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C O U N T R Y D I A R Y

Pages from a country diary
By
Percival Somers

London, Arnold, 1904



WITH MANY A SILVERY WATER-BREAK ABOVE THE GOLDEN GRAVEL.

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PAGES FROM A COUNTRY DIARY

JANUARY

Jan. 1st.—To-day being a general holiday the youth of the neighbourhood spend it in more or less ferocious games of football. Consequently, being in the village this afternoon, and remembering that I am a Vice-President of the Football Club, I looked in at the field where the local “Wanderers” were engaged in conflict with some neighbouring “Rovers.” I could not help being struck by, first, the good humour, or rather unconcern, with which the players treated the rough handling to which they subjected each other; and secondly, the fury with which their respective partisans hounded them on to further efforts: the yells of the latter could be heard quite half a mile away from the field. The most active person on the ground appeared to my untutored eye to be the gentleman who blows a whistle.

The hold which football has obtained over the affections of the “masses” within the last few years is perfectly astounding. When I was a lad and took an active interest in the game, public football was confined

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to a few purely amateur clubs—the Corinthians, the Old Etonians, and so forth; now every town and village supports one or more clubs; special “football” editions are published of all the provincial evening papers; and I am told that a popular match near one of the great manufacturing towns will attract a larger crowd than even a race-meeting; whilst it appears that a professional football player is far more highly paid than his brother cricketer. Nay, did not we all read during the war of how Thomas Atkins sought to relieve the tedium of his detention at Pretoria by playing football?

Well, all tastes are to be respected, though I am bound to confess that the flagrant professionalism of the Association game rather sticks in one’s gullet, but it is a fine manly pastime, and Rugby football to my mind is a most fascinating thing to watch. I remember the late Mr. “Bob” Grimston being taken late in life to see a Rugby football match for the first time. He looked on at the game in silence for a long time, and then said, “I should like to have played that when I was young.”

Jan. 5th.—To-day I helped to shoot the coverts at M——; the “second time through,” so we were restricted to “cocks only;” when, as a matter of course, hens presented themselves in the proportion of about four to one. However, none of us, including fortunately our host, altogether respected either age or sex when some specially fascinating rocketer presented herself; and I was reminded of the story of the undergraduate

who, shooting with his father in the days when to kill a hen pheasant was an offence of the first magnitude, involving a fine of five shillings, shot eight in succession, and then handing his infuriated parent a five-pound note, informed him he "would take another three pounds worth at the next covert."

At lunch speculation arose as to what is the fastest game bird that flies: that is to say, given equal conditions of atmosphere, and cause for flight—for all creatures, human or other, seek their highest rate of speed under the influence of fear—which of the birds reserved for sport would outstrip all others in a race of, say, two hundred yards; this being, I take it, the equivalent of a T. Y. C. scurry on a race-course. Personally, I should be inclined to back a bird, which, though not found in our islands, is indigenous to most of the rest of Europe, and which is familiar to all Englishmen who visit Scandinavia: the hazel-hen, or gelinotte. Yet curiously enough this is one of those forest-hunting birds which, like its cousin the American "fool-hen," usually flies up into a tree when flushed, and rejecting further attempts at escape, elects to be shot sitting. But on the rare occasions, and that they are rare I readily admit, when one catches a gelinotte in the open, I have never seen any bird fly so fast, nor move its wings with such extraordinary rapidity. Still I am a little doubtful of its ability to keep up this tremendous rate of speed for two hundred yards. Next to it I think I should place a teal, which has a marvellous knack of getting under weigh quickly; and I would give the

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third place to a blue-rock pigeon—the wild, not the Hurlingham, variety.

Still, to use a turf expression, it would be a good betting race, and one would probably be safest in backing the field.

Jan. 7th.—Walking home this afternoon I fell in with Mr. Tiplady, a small farmer who has recently settled in these parts. He bears the reputation of being rather a cantankerous kind of gentleman, and is usually at variance with his neighbours; but to-day he entered freely into conversation, under the delusion, I fancy, that he would obtain some sound legal advice gratis. It is no doubt flattering, but equally inexplicable, that people in his class should persist in crediting a magistrate with a knowledge of the law: one would have thought that experience would have taught them better by now. However, Mr. Tiplady proceeded to lay his griefs before me at considerable length, though I had some difficulty in following him through the maze of his rhetoric, as, when he warmed to his subject, his speech—he hails from the north-east of England—became well-nigh incomprehensible. It appears that he suffers much at the hands of a certain Johnson, who, he alleges, wishes to establish a right-of-way across his farm. Matters seem to have come to a head between them yesterday, but the account of this is best given in Mr. Tiplady's own words. “Sae, ar sez tee him, Johneson, ar sez, ef thou cooms on mar land agean ar'l fell¹ thee.”

¹ Anglicé, “knock you down.”

"Well," I asked, "and what did he say to that?"

"Saay," retorted the indignant Tip, "wye, he said nout, but joost ganned doon lonning tappey-lappey," which being interpreted means that Johnson made no reply, but ran away down a lane as fast as his legs could carry him.

"Tappey-lappey" is new to me, and I venture to think distinctly good: the etymology of the expression would be interesting. Some of us may doubtless remember that Mr. Puffington's famous chestnut horse, on which he so gallantly led the "Walters," was called Tappey-Lappey.

But seriously, since we cannot all adopt such heroic measures as Mr. Tiplady, there is no doubt that the law of trespass in England as opposed to Scotland, where it is far more stringent, needs some amendment. At present, unless a landowner or farmer can prove wilful damage—not always the easiest of matters—he is practically powerless to prevent people from trespassing on his land. One of the most fertile sources of trespass is the search for mushrooms, blackberries, and wild flowers,—a benevolent judicature having decided that such things are not the property of the person on whose land they grow. On what grounds they can be held to belong to any one else passes my comprehension. It surely cannot be claimed that they are without value. A stroll down a London street in spring-time would refute this as far as wild flowers are concerned, while the marketable value of blackberries, hazel-nuts, or mushrooms, needs no demonstration: a farmer in my

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neighbourhood told me he sold nearly twelve pounds worth of the latter off his farm a year or two ago.

But it is not the mere value of such things that is the chief cause for complaint, it is the damage—often, I admit, unintentional—done by those who come to steal them. Gates are left open, to the injury, and even destruction, of valuable stock; gaps are established in hedges, which it has taken years of care and attention to bring to maturity; and a gentleman (or more often, I fear, a lady), who would scorn to take a rose from your garden, or an apple from your orchard, will coolly descend on to another's land and dig up and carry away hampers full of such flowers as lilies-of-the-valley, or daffodils; while the fact that the scene of their marauding operations may be full of the nests of breeding pheasants does not act as the slightest deterrent.

Jan. 9th.—Dined to-night with the C.'s. It is the fashion to decry country dinner parties, and I confess that there are times when the prospect of a long drive in frosty weather prompts me to suggest a refusal of invitations to such gaieties; but Belinda, who is an ardent supporter of all forms of social amenities, sternly puts a veto on such faint-heartedness. Like all good housewives, she takes a keen interest in the performances of her friends' cooks—from a purely culinary and not gastronomical standpoint—and when, as not infrequently happens, the vaulting ambition of these artists overleaps itself, she views the situation in much the same spirit of

equanimity as we read of a Russian reverse in Manchuria, or as Sir William Harcourt would receive the news that Mr. Chamberlain's orchids had been nipped by the frost.

Happily the introduction of the post-prandial cigarette has robbed the country dinner party of one of its chief terrors, and I look back with a shudder to the days when, with a palate simply craving for tobacco, one was forced to sit drinking wine one did not want, with a prospect of two hours of bad whist, or worse music, before relief could be obtained. There is still one house in our neighbourhood, at which we occasionally dine, where our host sternly refuses to allow smoking in his dining-room, a fact rendered all the more galling by his own indulgence in snuff as soon as the ladies have left the room. It must seem well-nigh incredible to the youth of the present generation that there was once a time, not so very distant either, when smokers in country-houses were treated as a species of Ishmaelite, only allowed to indulge in their vicious habits in kitchens and servants' halls after the legitimate occupants of these regions had retired to bed.

Last night, after we had exhausted the usual topics of a country dinner-table, the machinations of the County Council, or the Clothing Club, the doings of the hounds, the shortcomings of servants, and the contents of the last box of books from Mudie's, conversation happened on curious recoveries of lost articles, *a propos* of which one of the party told us an interesting story of an officer who was killed in one of the earliest battles of the late war. I give it here as it was told, slightly

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altering dates and localities. Some years ago the officer in question, a subaltern in a hussar regiment, whom we will call M., received a legacy of a ring, a single diamond of no great value, mounted in an old-fashioned "claw" setting. Shortly afterwards, M., then quartered at York, was walking with some brother-officers by the side of the Ouse, which was running bank high after a winter flood. The conversation turned on swimming, and, after some discussion, M., with the inherent love of the British subaltern for dangerous exploits, undertook for a trifling wager to swim the river in his clothes. This he succeeded in doing, and as soon as he landed on the opposite bank he naturally ran straight back to the cavalry barracks to change his wet garments, when he found he had lost his ring. With but faint hope of ever seeing it again, he issued a handbill offering a reward for its restoration, and within a week it was brought to him, having been found by an angler, actually lying in the mud and shallow water of the river edge. This I will call Recovery No. 1.

A year later, M., being, not in sleepy old Eboracum, but in New York, found on coming home late one night from the theatre, that the diamond had dropped out of its setting. To recover this would have seemed perfectly hopeless to most people, but, nothing daunted, M. inserted an advertisement in the papers, with the result that the tiny gem *was* returned to him, having been picked up by an honest man in a car of the Elevated Railway. Recovery No. 2.

M. had the stone reset, and for several years it safely attended its master's fortunes in various parts of the world. Then, quartered in India, he was suddenly ordered on active service in Afghanistan. He had been campaigning for some time, when, noticing the stone appeared loose in its setting, he prised it out, and sealing it up in an envelope, on which he wrote his name and regiment, placed it in his haversack. Very early one morning the troop of Bengal Lancers, to which he was temporarily attached, was suddenly ordered on reconnaissance duty, and, hurriedly departing, left their temporary camp to be struck by a handful of native followers. This was an opportunity not lost on the tribesmen of the vicinity, who, waiting until the soldiers were safely out of hearing, descended on the camp, and, after butchering every soul in it, naturally looted everything they could lay hands on. It was not until the news of this reached him that M. remembered he had left his haversack in camp!

Soon afterwards peace was concluded with the turbulent Afridis, and M. returned to India, where he still continued to wear his ring with its empty setting. When asked, as he frequently was, why he did not get this filled with another stone, he would placidly reply, "Because I am waiting for my diamond to come back to me." Months passed away, and it did—by registered post! A sergeant of Highlanders, in command of a detachment employed in road-making in the very valley where the camp had been looted, actually found the haversack at the bottom of a *khud*, where it had pre-

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sumably been cast by the Afridi who had rifled it of all its contents *except* the envelope containing the diamond. M.'s name was still faintly legible on this, and the sergeant sent it down to Peshawur, whence it was forwarded to him in the manner described. Recovery No. 3, which I venture to think the most extraordinary of all.

I wonder whether the diamond still clings to its owner's finger, where he lies with other brave men on the slopes of Talana Hill, or whether it went to adorn the grimy hand of a Boer vrouw on the far-away African veldt?

Jan. 15th.—It is the little things of life that show us so unmistakably that we grow older every day; the discovery, usually gradual, but occasionally brutally sudden, that we can no longer do something which up till then we have treated as a matter of course. It may be inability to read small print without the aid of glasses, or to run upstairs two steps at a time; to drink port wine at night, or have a cold bath of a morning; but whatever it may be, the day inevitably comes when you fail in its performance, and have to accept the situation with such philosophy as may be yours by nature. Such a case has been brought home to me to-day. For the past week we have been favoured with those samples of weather which go to make up the climate of our islands, but which have finally culminated in three days of such rigorous frost as to render skating on shallow water possible. Consequently, after lunch to-day Belinda and

I drove over to the lake in W. Park, where we found half the countryside on the ice.

But when I had donned my skates for the first time for several years, I was forced to recognise that the present generation has learnt to skate at a "Prince's" where the floor is of ice, and not, as in my young days, of cement, and I cut but a sorry figure among the scientific performers of grape-vines and rockers. Nor did I fare any better when I sought refuge in a game of hockey, for here I was at once relegated to the office of goal-keeper, no doubt an honourable, and even responsible post, but which I had hitherto regarded as reserved for the senile or infirm. Here I spent most of my time flapping my arms across my chest in a vain attempt to keep warm, and watching some curlers who had established a rink hard by.

Curling is a game which I have played as a boy, but for which, like its Caledonian sister, golf, I could never raise any great amount of enthusiasm. I suppose one needs to be born north of the Tweed to do so. There could, however, be no doubt as to the nationality of the players to-day, which was equally revealed by their speech and their excitement; though hitherto I had hardly credited our little shire with containing so many Scotchmen. Still, like factors, Scotch doctors and gardeners flourish in every soil, and the curlers were chiefly recruited from all these admirable professions. It was delightful to see how they laid aside all class distinctions for the nonce, and relapsing into their native Doric, admonished or commended one another

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with the most unvarnished frankness. Such enigmatical remarks as "Soop her oop ; canny noo, canny," or "Eh ! man, doctor, ye're ower strang ; yon was a gey bad shot," contrasted strangely with the yells of the more aristocratic hockey-players, and my heart warmed to the honest Scotchmen absorbed in their pastime, and I hope they finished the day with beef and greens for supper. Equally do I trust they have not suffered so abominably from stiffness in the lower limbs as I am doing at present. *Ay de mi!* it took more than an afternoon's skating to make my legs ache twenty years ago.

Jan. 18th.—To-day being Sunday I walked in the afternoon to ask after old James, who has been laid up with rheumatism, and was glad to find him better and able to walk about his cottage. In the course of conversation he informed me he would never be well of his chronic ailment until he has been "well stung wi' bees!" Curiously enough, this is the second person who has said the same thing to me within the last year ; and I believe it is a well-accepted belief of the labouring classes in this district, that to allow yourself to be thoroughly inoculated with the poison of the sting of bees is a complete and lasting antidote to rheumatism. I wonder if the same idea prevails in other parts of England, and what grounds there are for the belief! It is certainly an heroic remedy, and I have not yet come across any one who has voluntarily submitted to the treatment.

Walking home along a quiet lane I became interested in a little zoological comedy which, but for me, would

probably have developed into a tragedy. Stopping to fill my pipe, I noticed a hare that was feeding under a very thick fence at the foot of a steep little hill or bank, and presently became aware that the hare had another interested observer in the shape of a fox, who was watching it from some distance off with unmistakable felonious intent. Neither animal was aware of my vicinity, and it was interesting to watch the careful way in which the fox thought out its plan of attack. It could not approach the hare unseen from its present position, so after careful examination of the ground it slipped noiselessly away, evidently intending to make a circuit and come down on its quarry from behind. Realising this, as soon as it had disappeared I threw a pebble at the hare, which departed incontinently. Very soon, as I had anticipated, the fox reappeared creeping and crawling over the shoulder of the hill. The thick fence at the foot of this prevented it from seeing that the hare had gone, so it wormed its way silently down the slope, and presently popped through the fence on to the very spot where the hare had been feeding, and which it must have marked with the most extraordinary accuracy.

I have rarely seen a human being, and certainly never an animal, look so thoroughly disconcerted as this fox when it found its supper had departed (I was within fifty yards of it all the time). It looked plaintively round with an air that said as plainly as if it had spoken, "Now I could have sworn there was a hare here;" then it took a cast round, exactly like a retriever

hunting for a wounded bird, until it came on the line of the hare, which it only followed for a yard or two, recognising, no doubt, in some mysterious way, that it had left at full speed, and was not worth following. The fox then sat down to reflect on the mutability of vulpine wishes, scratched its ear for a moment, and finally giving itself a philosophical shake as much as to say, "Well, old boy, you are sold this time, but after all, I daresay the hare was a tough old Jack only fit for jugging," it trotted straight down to the gate where I was standing. It never saw me, and I allowed it to come within four or five yards of me, when I popped my head over the top of the gate-post and said "Bo!" and in two seconds that fox had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed it up.

The extraordinary smoothness and rapidity with which a fox can disappear is, in my limited experience, only surpassed by one other wild animal—the elk. I have stood within fifty yards of a bull-elk in a Scandinavian forest, waiting for it to move so as to obtain a clear shot, and suddenly a side puff of wind has brought the great brute knowledge of my vicinity, and it has vanished so suddenly, so instantaneously, that it seemed hard to believe that it had been ever there. This, too, in timber so dense that one would hardly have thought a rabbit could move unheard; and yet these monstrous deer, weighing anything up to half a ton, slip through such places noiselessly as ghosts.

Turning over an old scrap-book after dinner this evening, I chanced on two newspaper clippings of ancient

date, which both struck me as intensely humorous. I reproduce them for the benefit of my readers, substituting of course fictitious names for those in the originals. One records the marriage of "Henry Brown of Camberwell to Matilda, eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Smith of Birmingham." So far there is nothing unusual about the paragraph, but it concludes with the words: "The Lord gave; the Lord hath taken away!" I am much exercised in mind as to whether this is an attempt at irreverent humour on the part of the compositor who "set up" the announcement; or an intentional expression of pious resignation by the bride's parents. On the whole, however, I incline to the latter view, fortified in my opinion by the story of the old Scotch lady who, in proclaiming the betrothal of one of her ill-favoured and dowerless daughters, gratefully observed that "The Lord had sent Jeannie a Captain."

The second clipping was one of those reports from Scotch shootings which appear in *The Field* every August, and ran thus: "Tommiebeg, Perthshire.—On the 12th August, 25 brace of grouse, 7 various; on the 13th 20 brace of grouse, and on the 14th 12 brace up to lunch-time. No shooting after lunch, Captain Scattercash having shot the dogs!"

What a tragedy these few words represent, and what a fertile field for conjecture do they open up! I wonder if they had plenty more dogs at home, or if they had to resort to driving at Tommiebeg for the rest of the season? Whose dogs were they, and why did the Captain shoot them? I fear he must have been a man

of ungovernable passions, and have done so designedly, for surely no one could shoot more than one dog by accident on the same day; before luncheon too. Finally, when he read the paragraph in *The Field* did he return to Tommiebeg to shoot the person who had inserted it? This latter contingency strikes me as not improbable.

Jan. 19th.—To-day Jack dined and slept here. Having passed scatheless through the recent war, he now courts death four times a week hunting on £30 screws. The scene of his exploits is in South —shire, where the hunting-fields are largely augmented by sportsmen from the great manufacturing towns of that district. Recently, in the course of a slow dragging run, hounds crossed a field of seeds which of course the main body of the hunt refrained from riding over. However, two gentlemen, who up till then had not shown very prominently in the van of the chase, apparently deemed this verdant expanse of sward a Heaven-sent excuse for a gallop, and spurted across it in gallant fashion. On the far side they were met by Lord B., the M.F.H., a somewhat choleric person, who addressed them at some length, and with considerable vigour on the enormity of their offence. The culprits received his rebuke in silence; but when his back was turned, one of them in a deeply-injured voice remarked for the benefit of the bystanders, that he “’ad ‘unted with many packs of ’ounds, but ’ad never before been sworn at for crossing a *grass field*.” Truly a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

Jan. 20th.—To A.'s for an afternoon's ferreting, a form of sport for which few men have much stomach once they have emerged from boyhood, and in which I myself have not indulged for probably a dozen years. Nor have my experiences to-day created any desire for a renewal of them, though the rabbits bolted well, and once I had regained the forgotten knack of killing them, I acquitted myself fairly creditably. Yet at the best it is a dreary, and but too often, a cruel, form of shooting. However, A. is planting very extensively on his estate, and has therefore wisely determined to exterminate every rabbit on it, whether by fair means or foul, for of all the evils to which young trees are heir, there are few more fatal than the ravages of the coney. Notwithstanding this is an admitted fact, the British landowner is such a creature of custom, that generation after generation allow their young plantations to be destroyed, or mutilated, by an animal which, viewed from either a sporting, or a profitable, standpoint, has an exceedingly low value.

There is probably no rural art so neglected in our islands as that of forestry. The idea of planting woods for any purpose beyond that of ornament, or as covert for game, seems never to be entertained, while our whole system of forestry is admitted to be radically wrong. Indeed we have so little knowledge of the subject that our Indian Forest officials had, until a few years ago, to undergo the practical side of their training at the French government school at Nancy; a state of affairs which redounds but little to our enterprise as a nation. There is no climate in Europe better adapted for the growth of

timber than our own, and there are hundreds of thousands of acres in the United Kingdom fit for but little else; yet the estates, whether belonging to the Crown or to private individuals, where arboriculture is conducted on common-sense, much less scientific, principles, could probably be counted on the fingers of one's two hands.

Jan. 23rd.—Greatly as hotels have improved of late years in London, the same cannot be said of country towns, in which, as a general rule, it appears impossible for a traveller to obtain decent food. To-day, having business at X., the chief town of a neighbouring county, I sought some lunch in the leading hotel of the place, an imposing-looking building. Here, in a coffee-room even at this season of the year haunted with crawling flies, I interviewed a German waiter in a last week's shirt. The only available hot viands, he informed me, were kidney soup and shoulder of mutton, but a whiff of these delicacies, which I had caught on entering the hotel, not tempting me to a closer acquaintance with them, I asked for some cold meat, and was given my choice of a very dry, attenuated fowl, a moist, pale ham, and the half-raw remains of some ribs of beef. I selected the latter, which was presently served me on an egg-and mustard-stained tablecloth, together with two solitary waxy potatoes and a slab of bilious-looking cabbage in dirty pewter dishes. The heel of a stale loaf, some dubious butter much mangled by the knives of previous lunchers, two sticks of celery in a tumbler of foul water, and a cheddar cheese from America, completed my repast,

which I washed down with a whisky and soda. For this I was charged three shillings and sixpence, plus a douceur to the waiter, who, by way of whetting my appetite, passed a dirty napkin over each plate that he handed to me.

Now X. is by no means an insignificant place; it is the capital of its county; it contains some thirty thousand inhabitants and returns a Member to Parliament; it is the centre of a large agricultural and industrial district; and one would imagine that in a place of such size and importance one would obtain food which, however plain, was at least palatable and decently served.

Yet this is not an exceptional case; the above may be taken as an everyday instance of the catering provided for the casual visitor to nearly all English provincial towns; and I think most people's experience will coincide with my own. As I walked up to the railway station on my way home, I mentally contrasted the repast of which I had just partaken with the one which I obtained a year or two ago at the little Pyrenean village of Argelès, where Belinda and myself arrived, unexpected, one fine February day. As we drove up to the little village inn, the landlord himself met us at the door, and in answer to our demand for immediate food—we were ravenously hungry—begged for twenty minutes in which to prepare it. This was the lunch with which he supplied us at the end of that time, the whole, be it noted, perfectly cooked and served. Fresh trout; an appetising dish of chicken à l'Espagnole; neat little cutlets and *pommes soufflées*; a woodcock—*parlez*

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moi d'ça—and an omelette *aux fine herbes*; the whole topped up with delicious *crêpes*, pastry, and a fragrant little cream-cheese. Two sorts of rough country wine were included gratis, and afterwards I had such a cup of coffee as I have never tasted in any London club, and the usual *petit verre*. The total of the bill amounted to nine francs, or exactly as much per head as I was charged for my indigestible meal at X., while the neat waitress was so charmed with the exceedingly modest tip that I bestowed on her, that as we drove away she appeared with an enormous bunch of violets which she presented to the delighted Belinda. We may be a nation of shopkeepers, a fact by the way for which we cannot be too grateful, but when I contrast these two typical meals I cannot help wishing that our commercial instincts had been leavened by a little culinary taste.

Jan. 25th.—I suppose that in our time most of us have suffered at the hands of *enfants terribles*, or equally probable, in “childhood’s happy hours” have been the cause of suffering to others. *A propos* of this, the vicar told me an appalling anecdote of some friends of his, eminent philanthropists, who are blessed with a most precocious son and heir. A short time ago, it fell to their lot to entertain for a church congress a gentleman up till then a stranger to them, who had been a missionary in China, where he had suffered many indignities at the hands of the Celestials, including the truncation of his nose. Recognising that the absence of this organ

would offer a most fertile field for comment to her offspring, the lady of the house summoned him to her presence on the day that the stranger was expected, and said, "Now, Freddy, a gentleman is coming to stay here, and when you come down to dessert this evening remember *we won't talk about his nose.*" Freddy cheerfully promised to observe the parental hint, but alas! it had been too diplomatically worded; for on introduction to the mutilated missionary, he gazed spell-bound at him for a moment, and then squeaked out: "Mama! mama! how *could* we talk about his nose? He hasn't got one!"

Jan. 31st.—Coming down to breakfast this morning, I found a letter from my neighbour H. urgently pressing me to come over for a final day's partridge shooting under a kite; an invitation of which, at first sight, I was by no means inclined to avail myself. In the first place the weather was not of a nature to tempt a sportsman of mature years to brave the elements; it was, to quote Charles Kingsley, "a soulless, skyless, catarrhal day—when a cold suck of wind just proved its existence by toothache on the north side of all faces," which I had intended to devote to wiping off arrears of correspondence, varied with occasional tobacco, in a comfortable arm-chair by my own fireside; secondly, my recollections of shooting partridges under a kite, a form of sport in which I had not indulged for nearly twenty years, were not such as to tempt me to renew them; while, in addition, I have a sort of apologetic

feeling that all game, but especially partridges, has earned a respite by the end of January. Moreover, I have always looked on the attempt to circumvent game by means of a kite as a kind of better-class poaching, only practised by shooting-fanatics like H.

However, husbands propose and wives dispose, and Belinda at once decided that it would do me far more good to be out shooting than "stewing" over the smoking-room fire, so the dog-cart was ordered round, and I was packed off, *nolens volens*, to my day's sport. By the way, how curious it is that even the best of women all seem of opinion that a man has no right to indulge in any form of recreation, except severe physical exercise; an inherent idea which must have been handed down through successive feminine generations from the pre-historic days, when existence depended on the head of the family's skill in hunting. It is fortunate that such a state of things no longer exists, or, judging by the performances of some of the people I meet out shooting, there would be a good many poor children go very hungry.

Arrived at H.'s, I found him in a state of jubilant excitement over a new and very hideous kite just arrived from London, the sight of which he assured me would cause the partridges to seek the shelter of the hedge-rows, where they would lie like stones, until we kicked them up. Accordingly, we sallied forth full of anticipation, the kite struggling and straining in the hands of a grinning, but evidently sceptical, stable-boy. I can truthfully assert that the effect of this infernal in-

vention on the partridges was electrical; every covey in the neighbourhood was at once on the alert, but so far from seeking to hide themselves in the hedgerows, they flew high over the tops of them, and in most cases continued their flight beyond the confines of my host's estate. Consequently, the greater portion of the day was spent in walking over sticky fallows in vain pursuit of them, while H. and his keeper alternately bawled directions to the youth in charge of the kite, who early lost all interest in the day's proceedings. Once, indeed, when struggling through a thick, overgrown fence, we did walk into a small covey on which the kite had produced its proper effect; and it was certainly curious to note the behaviour of the panic-stricken birds, which lay till we were actually trampling among them. One flew shrieking within a foot of my head; another doubled round the keeper's legs, and all of them, dodging and twisting like snipe, went straight into the recesses of a neighbouring wood. In the circumstances, I was not sorry that we had withdrawn our cartridges before scrambling through the fence; especially in view of the fact that my host rather prides himself on being “quick on his bird.”

Our bag at the end of the day was but four brace, and more than ever convinced that it is unsportsman-like to shoot partridges under a kite, I returned home in no very good humour, which Belinda unjustly attributed to my having shot badly.

FEBRUARY

Feb. 3rd.—For lack of more interesting occupation, I walked this afternoon to the coursing meeting at C. Coursing is a sport which has rarely come in my way, and for which I have no special affection, especially as it is always a puzzle to my untutored mind why the prize is not necessarily awarded to the dog which kills the hare. This must surely have been the purpose for which the greyhound was created, or evolved; and were I the possessor of one I should certainly prefer a dog that kept my table supplied with hares, to one that did not fulfil this qualification, no matter how much cleverer or faster the latter might be.

Perhaps because I have so little acquaintance with them, greyhounds do not appear to me a very attractive kind of dog, and I suppose no one makes companions of them as of terriers or retrievers. Still I can hardly conceive a more beautiful sight, than, as I saw more than once to-day, a brace of greyhounds taking a fence side by side at top speed, and going on in their stride without the slightest check or falter. They seemed the embodiment of combined grace and strength.

It is rather the fashion to look down on coursing as both a cruel and a low-class amusement, but neither

accusation seems to me fully justified. The agony of body and mind undergone by a hunted hare must assuredly be far greater than that of a coursed one, yet hare-hunting is not regarded as a specially cruel sport; while as regards the latter indictment it has been truly said that the greyhound is the poor man's race-horse, and that it is scarcely fair to decry a sport because it is comparatively inexpensive. Whether it be to the benefit of the poor man to concern himself with either race-horses or greyhounds is, however, another matter altogether. Most of the owners of running dogs to-day seemed to be farmers or small tradesmen, while although there were plenty of ragged-looking fellows among the spectators, I saw none of those criminal and brutish faces so common on a racecourse. True, there was a sprinkling of betting-men in wondrous apparel, girt with broad leather belts heavily ornamented with crown pieces—these, I presume, not for circulation, but as an ostensible guarantee of good faith—but they seemed to me to do more shouting than betting.

Feb. 8th.—Walking this Sunday afternoon in a quiet wood I chanced on what I take to be a fox's *Lust-haus*, or arbour, most artfully contrived under a heap of fir-loppings. It lay on the slope of a small clearing where it caught the full force of the morning sun; it was proof against wind or rain; a little purling stream ran within a few yards of it, and lined with warm, dry, bracken, it formed an ideal retreat for an elderly fox of luxurious

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habits. Alas! that I should have to add that the heads of two cock-pheasants—probably winged birds caught after the last covert-shoot—and the skeletons of sundry rabbits proved that the owner of this charming sylvan resort did not frequent it for the purpose of meditation only.

A propos of foxes a good story has reached me from the X. Y. Z. country, which lies in one of the Home Counties. Like many other hunting countries this long possessed an “old customer,” an enormous dog-fox, which, after defying all attempts to bring about its destruction in the legitimate manner, at length died a natural death of sheer old age. Its corpse was found by a gamekeeper, and sent to the secretary, a well-known ornament of the Stock Exchange, who despatched it to London to be stuffed. In course of time, duly set up in a glass case, it was returned to him at his City office, whence he conveyed it by train to his residence in the country. Travelling in the same compartment with him on this occasion were two or three brother-members of the Hunt, who, learning the contents of their friend’s unwieldy parcel, begged for a peep at them. Accordingly the brown-paper wrappings were removed from the case, and the “old customer,” grinning over the stereotyped rabbit, duly criticised and admired. Seated in a corner of the carriage was an elderly, inoffensive-looking stranger who in turn asked to be allowed to inspect the work of art. Permission was, of course, readily accorded by the delighted secretary, and after a careful and minute examination through his gold-rimmed spectacles, the

old gentleman politely observed, "A remarkably fine specimen. *Your own shooting, I presume, sir?*"

Feb. 9th.—To-day I have been shooting wood-pigeons, a sport that, when enjoyed in perfection, ranks only second to grouse-driving. It has been bitterly cold, with a strong north-east gale, accompanied by driving snow-squalls: weather which invariably drives our wood-pigeons to shelter in a certain fir plantation, for which I set forth after an early lunch, accompanied by old Sam, the retriever. Crossing the open, the gusts of wind were so violent and so piercingly cold that I could scarcely struggle against them, but once inside the wood the force of the gale was completely broken by the thick belt of Scotch firs and spruces, so that though I could hear it roaring overhead, I might almost as well have been in a house for all I could feel of its violence. Small wonder that wood-pigeons, and indeed all wild creatures, make for such plantations in this bitter weather, while their value as a shelter for stock can hardly be over-estimated. Crossing the park I noticed that even the hardy West Highland bullocks had got under the lee of a belt of firs, and were standing with patient lowered heads, tail on, to the icy blast.

To loiter about in a wood has always been one of my chief pleasures on account of the opportunity it affords for watching wild creatures, but to-day was rather too cold for much to be astir. A starved-looking hare hopped in ungainly fashion down a ride, occasionally stopping to crop half-heartedly at the tufts of withered

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grass. It looked very cold and miserable, and recalled Keats' perfect lines to me—

“St. Agnes' eve ! Ah ! bitter cold it was,
The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass.”

It had hardly disappeared ere a squirrel swung itself into a neighbouring tree, and spying me, began to chatter and swear in the most outrageous fashion, no doubt cautioning the neighbourhood that a horrid man with a gun was about, and evidently up to no good. Nor was its warning without effect; a minute or two later the harsh note of an unseen jay, and the impudent chuckle of a blackbird showed that the hint had been taken.

Next a tiny blue-tit settled on a pine-stem almost within reach of my hand, but while I was watching it methodically probe every cranny of the bark in search of food, and thinking how uncomfortable it must be to dine in such peripatetic fashion, a “flickering” of wings made me look up just in time to see a wood-pigeon beating steadily in against wind exactly over my head. Quickly as I threw up my gun the pigeon was quicker still; one stroke of its wing, and it was away down the gale at a pace no express train could rival, while the charge of shot I had intended should catch it exactly through the head merely tore its way through a promising young Scotch fir, covering me with pine-needles.

Although I don't like missing, this is the sort of thing that to me constitutes the great charm of wood-pigeon shooting. You pit your own skill and cunning against one of the craftiest and wildest birds that flies, and

unless you play every move in the game correctly, the pigeon will beat you. Two apparently simple axioms are essential to success: one, not to keep your face turned up to the sky—nothing shows so plainly against a dark background of trees, nor scares the pigeons more; and the other, to remain perfectly motionless until you throw up your gun to fire—but both are easier preached than practised.

I made many mistakes of this sort this afternoon, but was quite satisfied with my bag of nineteen pigeons. I admit that these were only obtained at a cost of fifty-seven cartridges; but I took every chance that presented itself, and did not pick my shots. By the way, nearly half the birds were of the smaller migratory variety that appears in flocks during the winter, and which is locally described as “furriners.” I have never yet been able to satisfy myself where these birds come from; they are popularly supposed to migrate here from Denmark, but I cannot ascertain the grounds for this belief. No doubt a few breed in this country, but not in sufficient numbers to account for the large numbers which appear and disappear every year.

An examination of the crops of the birds showed them in every instance to be simply crammed with young clover shoots; the loss to farmers from the depredations of wood-pigeons in hard weather must be enormous. I feel I have rendered a service to agriculture, while in addition I have the pleasing certainty that to-morrow I shall feast on wood-pigeon soup—most delicious of all game *purées*.

Feb. 10th.—When out for a walk this afternoon I witnessed what is undoubtedly an everyday tragedy in the life of the fields and hedgerows, but which had never come under my personal observation before. Crossing a pasture field my attention was suddenly attracted to a rabbit, which, without any apparent cause, was crouching on the ground squealing in an agony of fear. For the moment I thought it must be caught in some poacher's snare, but simultaneously a little, lithe, brown form came swiftly and silently up from behind and fastened with a devilish fury—the adjective exactly fits the action—on the back of the wretched rabbit's head. The poor brute redoubled its screams, but made, as it seemed to me, but very feeble efforts to dislodge its assailant, which stuck to it with leech-like venom, so absorbed in its horrid work, that it allowed me to approach within ten yards before it became aware of my presence and turned to fly. I am delighted to say I overtook and slew it—almost the biggest stoat I ever saw.

The poor rabbit was still alive, but with a gaping red hole in the back of its head; so putting it out of its pain, I bore it home and bestowed it on Thomas my gardener, who accepted it without evincing any fastidiousness as to the manner in which it had come by its death.

What is the occult influence which obliges a rabbit hunted by a stoat to suddenly give up all hope of escape, and sit down to await a cruel death, not calmly, but shrieking with apprehension? It is not physical exhaustion—to-day the rabbit was within fifty yards

of a plantation, which it could easily have reached—but a mysterious collapse of the nervous system, which would be more easy of comprehension if the victim *saw* its enemy, and were under the immediate fascination of its eye or appearance. What awful agony of mind it must suffer in those few seconds it sits awaiting the stoat's attack! how awful is shown by its pitiful screams! Still there is nothing so pitiless as Nature, which of a truth is—

“ One with rapine, a harm no preacher can heal ;
The May-fly is torn by the swallow, the sparrow speared by
the shrike
. . . a world of plunder and prey.”

It is curious to note how differently the various species of rapacious animals set to work to devour their prey. The felines, I believe, invariably commence with the throat, except in the case of milk-bearing females, when they attack the udder; bears, again, usually select the stomach, as a sort of *hors d'œuvres*; the mustelidæ suck the blood from the back of the ear; while the canines usually begin with the fleshy parts at the root of the tail; though a fox, in the case of a bird, always, in my experience, bites the head off first. In connection with this subject a fact came under my notice last year, which showed how strongly even our modern highly-domesticated dogs still possess the hereditary instinct of their rapacious ancestors. Two or three fallow-does had been mysteriously killed in the deer-park at B., near here, and, despite the absurdity of such an idea, it is perhaps unnecessary to add that their death was

laid as a matter of course to the door of poor Reineke, that universal scapegoat for all deeds of violence. However, as was to be expected, the culprit was eventually discovered to be a dog, a half-bred retriever; yet, although like its kind when they take to sheep-worrying, it merely ran and killed the deer for the pleasure of slaying, it never failed to take a hasty bite from the root of the tail. Now this was pure heredity, for when I say that the dog in question was a lady's pet, it will be readily understood that it was not hunger which drove it to crime.

Feb. 13th.—To-day I walked over to lunch with the A.'s, who have just returned from spending several months on the Irish property they unexpectedly inherited last year. Both are delighted with the place; A. appears to have had magnificent cock-shooting, while his wife is absolutely enthusiastic about the Irish, and full of anecdotes of their good humour and cleverness. One of her stories appears to me worthy of repetition. Mrs. A. is intensely devoted to animals, and insisted on taking a number of her pets to Ireland with her. Amongst them was a cage full of squirrels—animals, it appears, that are not indigenous to Connemara, and which excited the most intense astonishment among the natives of the district. Before returning to England the A.'s gave a party to their tenants and the general proletariat of the neighbourhood. Chief among the former was a certain old Peter Joyce, who, in virtue of being the oldest and most insolvent tenant on the

estate, had to sit next to Mrs. A. at supper. Now Peter had never seen her squirrels, but their fame had travelled across miles of bog and mountain to his cabin, and he was very curious about them. Moreover, he felt they would form an admirable topic wherewith to start the flow of small talk so many of us have a difficulty in producing at dinner, and consequently he deferentially asked, "An' how's yer little *swivils* gettin' on, mem?" "My little what?" demanded the astounded Mrs. A. "Yer little swivils," repeated old Joyce, and then seeing he was still misunderstood, he explained, "*thim little bastes like rats wid foxes' tails.*"

This evening I have been reading some very interesting experiences of life and adventure in Western America, dealing with that comparatively recent period when relentless war was waged between white men and Indians, and came across an anecdote showing how, under the influence of great fear, a human being can behave almost exactly like the rabbit I saw killed by the stoat the other day. Two Indians—one of whom subsequently told the story to the author of the book—came on the trail of a single white man. Quickly recognising by various signs, meaningless to any eye but a Red Skin's, that he was a "tender foot," they determined to follow him, in the hope of obtaining an easy scalp. Nor were they disappointed: when the poor wretch found escape was hopeless, he flung away his rifle and clung shrieking to his *hat*.

This appears to me an exact parallel to the behaviour of the hunted rabbit.

Feb. 16th.—At the request of our Hunt Secretary I walked over this afternoon to interview my neighbour, Mr. Tiplady, who had announced his intention of putting up barbed wire on his farm. He is a cross-grained old fellow, an immigrant into these parts from the far North, the tenant of some hundred acres of bad land, the property of a college at Cambridge. Twice a year a solicitor comes down from London to extract what proportion of the rent he can from the unwilling Tiplady, who otherwise is allowed absolute control over his farm. Consequently this is in the direst state of neglect and bad cultivation ; untrimmed fences, ill-hung gates, uncleared fallows, and starved pastures, on which a few unhappy-looking beasts strive fruitlessly to get a satisfying meal. But agriculture is not the only source to which Mr. Tiplady looks for a livelihood ; his holding is wedged in between the estates of two great game preservers, and, unless report belies him, he actually obtains more than the rent of his farm by sub-letting the right of shooting over it to a syndicate of pot-hunting tradesmen from the nearest town. Needless to add that hunting is anathema to him.

That such men are ever accepted as tenants of farms is of course regrettable from a national, no less than a sporting, point of view ; but there are two sides to every question, and there is a great deal to be said on Tiplady's. He cares nothing for sport as we understand it ; hunting to him merely means a number of strangers riding over his crops, and breaking down his already dilapidated fences, while a fox is only associated with disputed

poultry bills. He derives neither amusement nor profit from fox-hunting ; no one buys forage of him, and indeed, the oats and hay produced on his holding are not such as any one would care to set before their hunters.

Numerically small as this class of farmer fortunately is, it is none the less strong enough to do a great deal of harm to hunting, and consequently, I think, deserves rather more consideration than is usually shown to it. Men like Tiplady are soon made to feel that they are regarded as Pariahs and Ishmaelites beneath a respectable person's notice, a state of things which only serves to embitter them still further against sport ; whereas a little diplomacy in dealing with them would probably lead them to look on hunting with a less jaundiced eye. This fortunately proved to be the case to-day. I confess to having approached Mr. Tiplady, who bears the worst of reputations for amiability, with considerable misgivings, but after a great deal of bluster he finally consented not to put up the obnoxious wire on condition the Hunt supplied him with sufficient posts and rails to repair his fences. Nay more, on the conclusion of my visit he even accompanied me to the limits of his farm, and while doing so made a remark which I think sufficiently shows the class of agriculturalist to which — College has entrusted its property. Pointing to a rushy, swampy field, I remarked it would be the better for draining. "Dr-a-a-i-nin," scornfully repeated my new friend, "ar thenk nowt o' dr-a-a-inin' ; it nabbut takts t' heart oot o' t' land !"

On my way home I received a striking proof of the

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certainty with which men who spend all their days in the open air can prophesy a change in the weather. It had been freezing hard for two days; the earth was like iron, and the sky like steel; a razor-edged wind was blowing from the north-east; the sun was setting like a ball of fire; and the glass was steady at "set fair"; in fine, everything pointed to a protracted frost, and falling in with old Billy Purves plodding his weary way home from his day's work of hedging and ditching, I hazarded an opinion to this effect. But Billy, who like Tiplady hails from the North, shook his wise old head, and laconically said, "We shall hev' fresh¹ to-morrer." "What makes you think that?" I asked. "T' mowdywarps² is startin' to work," he replied; and sure enough, although it froze harder than ever that night, the next morning the wind suddenly veered round to the south-west, a warm rain began to fall, and a steady thaw set in.

Feb. 17th.—A long letter from my friend H., who adduces what he considers absolute proof of the vexed question whether salmon do, or do not, feed in fresh water. Fishing for pike in the Dorsetshire Stour with a gorge-bait he ran, and eventually landed, a salmon kelt, which he was obliged to kill, it having pouched his bait so voraciously as to render a surgical operation necessary for the recovery of the hooks. Now, without entirely agreeing with H. that this is conclusive evidence that salmon feed in fresh water—for a kelt hardly ranks as a salmon in the ordinary acceptance of the term—

¹ A thaw.

² Moles.

it certainly is corroborative evidence in favour of the theory, in which I personally am an implicit believer. It is urged, and very probably correctly, by those of different opinion, that salmon merely take an artificial fly from motives of curiosity. This is a point I am quite willing to concede: were salmon-flies real insects that flew about in the air, I am sure that I, and probably few other people, could refrain from trying to catch such beautiful things. To a certain extent the same argument can be applied to a spinning-bait, or even the much-abused prawn; but on the other hand, I cannot get over the fact that I have seen—as who has not—salmon rising at the natural fly, and above all, that they are caught like any ordinary coarse, fresh-water fish, with a bunch of worms. This latter fact appears to me absolutely irrefutable evidence that salmon do feed in fresh water; yet the opponents of this theory urge that it has been proved by foreign scientists, that from the moment salmon enter a river their digestive organs gradually become so shrunken and disordered as to render the absorption of food impossible. Presuming, for the sake of argument, this to be the case, why then should they eat worms which, of all forms of fresh-water food, must surely be the richest and most indigestible.

Equally are we to believe that, as soon as a salmon has spawned and become a kelt, the mucous membrane of its digestive organs undergoes a process of recuperation which enables it to feed again? The voracity of kelts is proverbial; yet if any one not having the fear of the law before his eyes were to feloniously kill and dissect even

the best "mended" of them, he would find no more food in its stomach than in that of a fresh-run fish. Personally I attribute this latter peculiarity of the salmon's to an ability, under the influence of fear or anger, to disgorge whatever food may be in its stomach at the time, as is done by a heron when hard pressed by a hawk. I regret I cannot remember in what book I have read, that many years ago a former Mr. Campbell of Islay, drawing a net full of salmon from the sea, distinctly saw the fish eject the contents of their stomachs in their endeavours to escape.

Equally does it seem impossible for a creature of such never-failing appetite as a fish to abstain from food for weeks, or even months, at a time, and subsist entirely on the fat of its own body. It must be remembered that most of the salmon killed with rod and line are ascending the rivers for the purpose of reproducing their species, a period when few of the lower animals, but especially the males, evince much desire for food. Consequently it is possible that a salmon on entering fresh water may not eat very voraciously at first, but that it abstains from food during the whole of its sojourn there, seems absolutely incredible. The whole question is a very vexed and equally interesting one; but in the absence of absolute proof to the contrary the natural presumption must be that salmon do feed in fresh water, a presumption, moreover, supported by the weight of evidence.

Feb. 23rd.—To dine and sleep at Tom's, who gave me a mount with the hounds. To hunt another person's horse is always a doubtful pleasure, in view of the possi-

bility of laming or otherwise disabling it. Moreover, there is another side to the question, of perhaps more personal interest; for all horses, when they find a stranger on their backs, are prone to an exhibition of whatever bad manners they may naturally possess. Commenting on this to Tom, he told me a story which he claimed as a personal experience, though I privately believe the anecdote to be of far older creation than his own imagination. Being shown through the stable of a friend who had promised him a mount on the following day, he was struck by the appearance of a certain chestnut horse, and expressed his admiration of it to his host. "I am glad you like its looks," cordially replied this gentleman; "that is 'Circumstances,' the horse you are going to ride to-morrow." "Why do you call it by such a curious name?" asked Tom in all innocence. "Because no one has the slightest control over it," was the horrifying answer.

During dinner last night the conversation turned on the abuse of the term "gentleman" (our housemaid recently informed Belinda she was engaged to be married to a "gentleman" at Nottingham—who, on inquiry, turned out to be a bookmaker's clerk), and we were all asked to define what in our opinion constituted the outward and visible sign of a gentleman. A youth from one of the universities, who was of the party, declared for "properly-cleaned boots;" I quoted Whyte-Melville, "a man who has dress-clothes;" but I think the best definition was Tom's, "a man who eats currant-jelly with his mutton."

I suppose every one has his own ideas on the subject.

Some years ago I was talking to an old Cumberland keeper, who had recently left his native dale for the first time in his life to visit a married daughter in one of the great Yorkshire manufacturing towns—Leeds or Sheffield, I forget which. “Fowk mun be tarrible rich theer,” he said, “t’ lads in t’ streets was arl like gentlemen, smoakin’ meershoom pipes.”

This must surely be the most marketable form of gentility, superior even to Baronetcies.

Feb. 25th.—To-day a camp of gipsies has established itself on the waste land at the foot of the lane. Formerly, gipsies used to be frequent visitors to these parts, but of late years one rarely sees them; and I fancy that they are far less numerous than they used to be, or are perhaps losing their old vagrant propensities from intermarriage with the “Gorgios.” None the less, I believe that they still cling to their old customs, for I recently read in the papers of the crowning or election of a gipsy King—at Yetholm, in Roxburghshire, if I remember rightly. By the way, I can quote a striking instance of the power wielded by these rulers, and one, moreover, which shows what a keen sense of gratitude the much-maligned gipsy can exhibit on occasion. When I was a little boy at school in the extreme South of England, the Queen of that part of Wessex was a certain Eleanor Stanley, and a fine, handsome, black-haired dame she was. The chief landowner in the neighbourhood, whom I will call Squire Oakball, used to show great kindness to her and her tribe, allowing them to camp on his land, to gather firewood,

and enjoy other trifling privileges, which, I have his own word for it, they never abused in the slightest.

One day a lady staying at Mr. Oakball's lost a valuable bracelet off her wrist when out sketching, and though she quickly discovered her loss and caused every possible effort to be made for its recovery, no trace could be found of the bracelet; and it was supposed that it had dropped unnoticed from her wrist, and been picked up by a gipsy-like lad she had noticed prowling about while she was sketching. Meeting Eleanor Stanley a few days later, Mr. Oakball gently hinted at this suspicion, only to receive a right royal answer. "A true Romany never steals," she replied, drawing herself proudly up, "but if one of my people have found your bracelet, and it be still within the four seas of Britain, you shall have it back." Three weeks later the bracelet, which had been lost within a mile of the English Channel, was sent to Mr. Oakball, post-marked Carlisle!

Feb. 27th.—A letter from Caroline, who is wintering in the Eternal City, and hunting with the Roman hounds. Among the notable followers of the chase on the Campagna is a certain Marchese —, a very tall, austere man of great social position in Roman society. Whether from motives of economy, or Chauvinism, the Marchese differs from most of his compatriots in that his hunting apparel is made in the Via Nazionale, and not in Savile Row. Consequently, it would hardly pass muster in even less fashionable resorts than Melton, and the irreverent Caroline has dubbed him "the long stern swell who wears the Roman clothes."

MARCH

March 8th.—As far as I am personally concerned, the month has assuredly come in like a lion, for during the last week I have been laid low by “It.” Even as a Russian shepherd, fearful of disasters to his flock, never speaks of a bear by its right name, but invariably refers to it by some dark soubriquet, so do I avoid more than a hint at my ailment, lest in its wrath it turn and smite me again. As usual It came on me without warning: a slight headache when going to rest one night gave no hint of what was to follow—three days of ceaseless tossing on a bed that afforded neither comfort nor repose; of racking pains from head to ankle; of incessant shivering despite a burning pulse.

And then, just as convalescence had really set in, I dared in my blind folly to treat It with contempt, and retribution followed swift and sure. I was really feeling better; I had lunched well, not without the port wine permitted in the circumstances; I had taken a gentle constitutional on the sunny side of the garden; I had actually returned to the house with the intention of enjoying a book until tea-time, when Thomas, the gardener, came hurriedly to the side-door and summoned me forth with the news he had seen a flock of wild-duck settle on the Moor Pond. For a moment

—why, oh! why, did I not obey the impulse?—I was tempted to consign both Thomas and the ducks to a much less humid spot than the one in question, and then I hesitated, and suffered the usual fate of the irresolute. “Were there many of them?” I feebly asked. “A matter of twenty,” Thomas would think. I paused again. Twenty of them! and to-day was actually the last on which I would be able to shoot anything, much less a wild-duck, before next August. Belinda was away for the afternoon; she need never know of my indiscretion until the birds appeared on the table, and at this juncture a brief but vivid mind-picture of a plump brown bird, fragrant of port-wine sauce and lemon-juice, finally clinched the matter.

The Moor Pond is not an easy place whereon to stalk ducks: it lies in one corner of a perfectly flat field, and the only available concealment is afforded by a straggling hedge which runs down one side of it, but this fence is both low and thin, and the man who would make use of it must needs “craal” like a deerstalker. Now the afternoon was fine, but the morning had been wet, and I had not crawled ten yards before my knees and elbows, and every portion of my anatomy that touched the sodden ground became imbued with a like humidity. Still, one does not pay much attention to such trifles in the ardour of the chase, and a peep through the fence rendered me quite unconscious of them. Thomas had neither lied, nor, more extraordinary still, exaggerated. There must have been rather forty than twenty ducks, unsuspiciously gobbling and feeding on the rushy margin of the pond.

Nearer and nearer I crawled, until scarce fifty yards remained ; I had marked two ducks feeding in line to take sitting with my first barrel ; I was actually pushing up the catch of my gun ; success seemed within my very grasp when—may the fate of all meddlesome jades attend the housemaid who let Rip, the fox-terrier, out of the smoking-room, into which I had carefully shut him !—*yap, yap, yap*, he came squeaking across the field, hot-foot on my trail ; up went every duck's head in an instant, and then, catching sight of me, they rose with a great roar of wings and splashing of water, and went away down-wind unharmed by the two fruitless charges of shot that a wet and angry man sent impotently after them.

The weary trudge home seemed thrice its real distance ; the sun went in, and the east wind blew ; my sodden garments clung to my aching knees, and even as I entered the house I felt It touch me once more with its icy finger. In vain did I seek to propitiate it with copious libations of ammoniated quinine ; in vain did I retire early to bed beneath a pile of blankets ; *on ne badine pas avec la grippe* ; and I woke next morning suffering with a relapse from which I am only just recovering.

March 12th.—Millicent writes asking for the names of some interesting books on sport, which she proposes to bestow on her second boy, who is on the point of leaving home to work in a city office. *Gaudet equis canibusque* ; pleasures from which he will now be debarred ; and his fond mother expects that this provision of congenial literature to turn to, “when he has finished his day’s

work," may prove a counter-attraction to more expensive, or less innocent, amusements. I am sure I hope so too, but expressed no opinion on this point when forwarding the following list of books, which I trust may afford Master Freddy the same gratification they have repeatedly yielded me. "Handley Cross," "The Moor and the Loch," "Riding Recollections," "A Hunter's Wanderings in South Africa," "Three in Norway," "Short Stalks," "Wild Beasts and their Ways," "Sport," Sir Edward Grey's "Fly-fishing," "The Wild Beasts of India," "Hunting Trips of a Ranchman," "Market Harborough," and, most perfect perhaps of all, St. John's "Wild Sports of the Highlands."

It is curious that, despite the enormous number of works on sport published nowadays, so few of them are written with any pretension to style. The author may be, and no doubt frequently is, an excellent sportsman, thoroughly conversant with his subject; yet in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he entirely fails to carry his reader with him through sheer lack of descriptive power. Contrast the ordinary account of, say, a day's deer-stalking, with the perfect narrative of the death of the Muckle Hart of Ben More in the last-named book on my list—perfect because so simply written, yet so full of word-painting. Or, again, compare the efforts of nearly any present-day writer on sport with the exquisite cameos of country life and scenery to be found in Charles Kingsley's works. How far-reaching the effect of such apparently insignificant things is demonstrated by the story of the officer who, reading "Yeast" when quartered

in China, determined then and there to go and hear the author preach as soon as he got back to England, because "there must be something in a parson who could write so well about fox-hunting."

March 14th.—Had any one told me ten years ago that the day would come when I should ride on a bicycle, I would have laughed him or her to scorn, but had it been further added that I should use it to go a-hunting on, I fear I should have been provoked to anger. None the less, both prophecies would have come true. For some time past, acting on the urgent advice of my bankers, I have desisted from the pleasures of the chase, and, I fancy like most men similarly situated, have sedulously avoided all contact with the hunting-field. To go fox-hunting in a carriage, or, worse still, on foot, has never had any charm for me; consequently, when Belinda, fired by the achievements of a lady friend, suggested a morning's hunting on bicycles, I took violent exception to the proposal, pointing out first, that such furious exercise was incompatible with my present feeble state of health, and secondly, that no one has any business out hunting except on horseback.

However, as was to be expected, I eventually yielded, having, I confess, a sneaking desire to see what hunting on a bicycle was like; and after a first experience of it am bound to admit that I enjoyed it more than I could have expected: indeed, but for an uneasy feeling that bicyclists out hunting are an undesirable innovation, I might almost be tempted to repeat the experiment. For

to-day all went well : the weather was cool without being cold, the roads were dry, and there was no wind. Moreover, the meet was on an old-fashioned village green, and we were able to dismount and "stable" our bicycles until hounds moved off to the nearest covert.

Here again fortune favoured us : this lay in a valley below the high-road, and when hounds found, the fox took a most accommodating line, running parallel to, and within sight of, the road for nearly two miles. Consequently we were afforded an unrivalled opportunity for criticising the performances of such of our friends and neighbours as were witching the world with noble horsemanship, and for assuring ourselves how much better we could have done this, had we only their chances. When Brown was seen waiting to take his turn at a gap, or Smith turning from the line of the chase to avail himself of a friendly gate, the onlookers on the road were not slow to hint how differently they would have acted in similar circumstances. How true is Rochefoucauld's maxim that to view the discomforts of others from a position of personal security has always a charm for poor human nature ; a maxim, by the way, borrowed from Lucretius :

" *Suave mari magno, turbantibus æquora ventis,
E terra, magnum alterius spectare laborem,*"

which in the present instance may be freely translated, that it is grateful to a bicyclist on the high-road with the wind behind him to see a horseman in difficulties.

But presently hounds turned from us, and disappeared

from both sight and hearing; when, following on their line, we were forced to leave the broad high-road for a narrow, rutty, country lane. Under no circumstances would this have been adapted for bicycling, but when there were crowded into it a dozen bicyclists of both sexes, as many pony traps full of excited ladies, the usual extraordinary pedestrians in long flapping ulsters who invariably turn up at meets, and, to crown all, the heavy or road-riding division of the hunt, none of them looking where they were going, and all pedalling, driving, running, and riding, their hardest the situation became rather strained and not adapted for the nerves of those who, like myself, have never come to regard their bicycles with absolute confidence. So Belinda and I pulled up and let the maddening panoply of the chase sweep by, and after eating our sandwiches on a sunny bank we followed slowly on at our ease, eventually proving the truth of the axiom that the race is not always to the swift; for hounds running in a ring, we presently came up with them again, and managed to keep them more or less in sight until their fox ran them out of scent.

Still, although I enjoyed my day's outing, I cannot help feeling that bicyclists are out of place in the hunting-field; no doubt a foolish, and possibly snobbish, impression, but from which I cannot entirely dissociate myself. However, I suppose I shall have to repeat to-day's performance whenever Belinda wishes it.

March 18th.—This afternoon to witness the arrival of a number of yearling trout with which A. is stocking a

pond—I beg his pardon—a lake, on his property, and got them just in time to see the little fish transferred to their new home. They had travelled hundreds of miles in their curiously-shaped tin cans, yet not one of them had died *en route*, nor did they appear a bit the worse for their long journey; within five minutes of being placed in the pond they were rising all over its surface, purely, I take it, from pleasure of feeling themselves at liberty again, for there was no fly on the water. May they flourish and fatten exceedingly, and may the day be not far distant when I shall be bidden to angle for them.

The present craze for stocking all and every kind of stream or lake with trout is in most instances highly commendable, yet, on the other hand, it is sometimes carried to excess, and merely transforms a natural excellent stronghold of coarse fish into an indifferent trout preserve. I have not fished for pike for many years, and am therefore not very competent to pronounce an opinion on the subject, but I am informed, and can readily believe, that nowadays it is easier to obtain good trout-fishing than similar sport with pike or perch. Then again, the latter is a form of angling obtainable when trout are out of season, and worthy of consideration on this ground alone. Moreover, when taken from *pure* water and properly cooked, pike are an excellent fish for the table.

Since boyhood I have had but little opportunity, and no inclination, for any form of angling save with the artificial fly; but the few devotees of bottom fishing

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of my acquaintance assure me that in its way it is as fine—in the sense of artistic—a sport as fly-fishing, a statement I can readily believe after seeing the professional bait-fishers of the Northern trout streams. True, these are scarcely bottom fishermen in the accepted sense of the term, but it is certainly marvellous to see how they can kill trout on a worm in the lowest and clearest water; while the extent to which they can depopulate a river by incessant exercise of their odious craft is no less revolting to the mind of the orthodox fly-fisher. As an instance of this let me cite the Northumbrian Coquet, one of the most beautiful trout-streams I have ever fished, which, when I last visited it, a few years ago, had been nearly ruined by the indiscriminate use of bait.

None the less, it seems ungracious to write or say anything derogatory to bottom-fishing when one recalls, as I suppose all men can, the rapturous pleasure it afforded one in boyhood. Even now I still look back with complacency to the “delectable day” when two small urchins, of whom I was one, killed in a single afternoon’s fishing in the Dorsetshire Stour no less than seven different varieties of fish, viz.: chub, roach, dace, perch, gudgeon, an eel, and last, and I am afraid least, for it was a most diminutive specimen of its race, a trout,—the first I think I ever caught.

March 22nd.—Poor Joe, the silver pheasant, was found dead in his pen last night, full of years, and, I should imagine, of gout, presuming this to be an ornithological

THE COQUET - MOST BEAUTIFUL OF TROUT STREAMS.



complaint; for with the most insatiable appetite he combined the vilest of tempers, being always ready to accept food and then peck the hand that gave it to him—and a peck from Joe's iron beak was not to be lightly treated.

He was certainly the handsomest bird of his kind I ever saw, and an object of great admiration to the proletariat of the neighbourhood, among which, however, some haziness appears to have existed as to his species; for, stopping to speak to old Purves as I came out of church this morning, he expressed his condolences on the death of my “cockatoo.”

March 23rd.—Crossing the Heath Farm on my way home from a “pottering” constitutional this afternoon, I stopped to watch old Jim the ploughman and his team breaking up the forty-acre field. To look on at such work has a strange fascination for me; I delight in seeing the soil fall away in great shining slices before the share to be immediately picked over by the rooks which follow audaciously at the ploughman’s heels; and in inhaling the clean, wholesome, smell of the newly-turned earth. Yet as I watched Jim and his horses wearily stagger and plod through the holding clay, I inwardly marvelled how any man ever willingly becomes an agricultural labourer. That this should be the case is, I suppose, the result of circumstances, coupled with some vague, inherent, love of the soil, though this latter trait of our national character becomes unhappily rarer every year. Nor, in view of the thankless monotony of a farm-

labourer's life, is it a matter for much surprise. Take the case of the man I was watching this afternoon, whom I have known for years.

From the time when, as a half-starved child, he first earned a few pence by bird-scaring, up to the present he has probably never known a single day of uninterrupted rest or relaxation; week in, week out, seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, for forty years he has trudged the fields of this, or some neighbouring farm; he has never been ten miles from his home in his life; he has never known any higher existence than his own, and, let us sincerely trust, has never aspired to one. This morning he rose before dawn, and breakfasted by candle-light off unappetising food, cooked and prepared the night before; then, stumbling across to the stable, he fed and yoked his horses and led them forth to the field. Since then, with the exception of two brief spells, when he ate more cold and indigestible food and took a few whiffs of rank tobacco under the shelter of a hedge, he has toiled up and down, down and up, the same field, with no companions but his horses and his own thoughts, which in the circumstances can hardly be presumed to be of the most cheerful nature. At five o'clock he will "lowse out," and take his horses back to the farm, where he will feed and dress them before he has his own supper, which exactly resembles his breakfast and dinner with the addition of a large bowl of exceedingly astringent tea. After this he will retire to rest in a tiny room which he shares with two of his children, and from which he rigidly excludes every breath of fresh air. Even then

he will have no certainty that his day's work is over, and that he will enjoy undisturbed repose; during the night the grey horse may have a fit of the colic, or the roan cow be taken in labour, and in either case poor Jim will have to struggle into his wet boots and attend to the sufferers.

Such is his existence from day to day, which he will continue to lead until that inevitable time when combined old age and rheumatism will incapacitate him from work. Then, if he have been a careful man, and subscribed to a friendly society, he may have such a pittance as will keep him out of the dreaded "house," and give him the decent funeral he looks on as the crown of a respectable existence.

Yet no one can say that his is not a useful, nor, in its way, almost a noble life. He works hard and honestly according to his lights; he faces poverty and hard fare like a man; he takes his lot as he finds it; and were he to discuss the question with you, would probably ask you to point out what other career had been open to him—a question that would be exceedingly difficult of answer.

Personally in his case I should have braved the contempt of my peers, and "listed for a sodger," when, even if there had been no field-marshall's baton in my knapsack, I should at least have seen a little of the world. Still this is a sentiment which only serves to demonstrate what a much more useful member of society Jim is than myself; a conclusion which irresistibly forced itself on me as I watched him this afternoon. After all I believe him to be perfectly contented with his lot, and why should I,

or any other agitator, seek to take up the mantle of Joseph Arch, and put him out of conceit with it?

March 24th.—Travelled to-day in the train with the P.'s, who are recent arrivals in these parts: a sudden and agreeable freak of fortune having unexpectedly translated them from a semi-detached villa at Balham to a country house; a sufficiently novel experience to both of them. He, worthy man, is a most inoffensive person who, I am told, comes down to breakfast in carpet slippers, and collects postage-stamps, and is, I fancy, inexpressibly bored by his new surroundings; but his lady, disgusted I presume with her spouse's lack of enterprise, has launched out with the courage of ignorance, into every possible form of what she considers the proper diversions of a country gentleman's wife. She keeps a cow and a pig; she invests largely in prize poultry and fancy rabbits; and, above all, has taken to hunting at a time of life when most ladies begin to think of abandoning the pleasures of the chase.

Not that all these are not harmless and even commendable amusements, could good Mrs. P. refrain from laying down the law on them, and all other phases of country life, on every possible occasion. She is specially wearisome on the subject of horses, of which she considers herself a consummate judge, until from the laughing-stock, she has now become the terror of the hunting-field. This afternoon, spying me in the train at X. station, she entered my compartment, and at once began to talk about horses. "Did I know of one to suit her; fast, clever,

and well bred? It *must* be a chestnut with white hind stockings"—and so on for five minutes without ceasing. At last she stopped for want of breath, and not without an inward prayer that Peter, my own slave of all work might suit her requirements, and find favour in her eyes, I asked what height she required in her paragon. "Oh! about 15·3," was her glib reply, "or at a pinch even 15·4!"

Mrs. P. got out at the next station, but until we reached it she never ceased talking about horses, and, even when standing on the platform and the train was moving off, screamed after me something about "splints," which I unfortunately failed to catch. I could but marvel at the demoralising influence of an animal which induces people, sane enough on all other points, to pretend to a familiarity with it that they do not possess.

This affectation is easily understood in a very young man; he knows no better, and will probably—but, alas! not inevitably—see the error of his ways as he grows older; but it is well-nigh incredible that a middle-aged woman like Mrs. P., whose experience of horses has hitherto been confined to those she has seen between the shafts of a cab, should not recognise the folly of such pretension. I am afraid that but too often this is the outcome of innate snobbishness: horses are more or less the prerogative of the wealthy, and therefore to have a knowledge of them implies either that you are well-to-do yourself, or the intimate of those who are. For instance, the good lady who has provoked this diatribe, imagines that her assumed familiarity with horseflesh removes from

her the stigma of being a Cockney; a term severally defined by my Johnson's Dictionary as, "a Londoner; a mean citizen." Now, Mrs. P. might tolerate being styled a Londoner, but a "mean citizen"—perish the thought!

Another depressing influence of the horse on its devotees, real or pretended, is that in course of time it inevitably becomes their sole topic of conversation; a fact which, deplorable in man, is unpardonable in woman: the former is a bore, but the latter a nuisance. *A propos* of this I cannot resist quoting a story, which, however improbable it may appear, is none the less perfectly true.

Lady A. once purchased a pony from one of the great London horse-dealers, whom we will call Mr. Sloane. On the strength of this transaction she apparently considered herself entitled to the freedom of his yard, which she visited with such frequency as to become intolerable both to him and his grooms. One afternoon she turned up as usual, and finding Mr. Sloane at home, at once attacked him on the subject of a team of horses she had seen him driving in the Park that morning. "They *were* such darlings! *Would* Mr. Sloane let her see them out?" This, of course, quite irrespective of the fact that at that hour the horses were bedded down for the evening.

Mr. Sloane was a little nonplussed by such an unexpected demand on his good-nature, but after a momentary hesitation yielded with that ready politeness for which he is famous. "Certainly, my lady," he replied, "I should like to have the opinion of so good a judge as yourself. I am sorry I cannot put the horses together for you, but you can have them out one by one. Here,

'Tom,' turning to his head man, "bring out the brown team one by one for her ladyship's inspection." Lady A. was delighted; it was *so* kind of Mr. Sloane; and the first horse being stripped and brought out, she subjected it to a careful scrutiny from nose to tail, with the result that she declared it to have marvellous shoulders, but to be light behind the saddle. "Perhaps you are right, my lady," assented the dealer impassively; "bring out the other wheeler, Tom." This, however, was declared by her ladyship to be the exact antithesis of the other, as although its back ribs were excellent, its shoulders were too straight. Then the leaders were exhibited and judged in their turn, and finally Lady A., declaring she had not had such a treat for many a day, took her departure in happy ignorance of the fact that she had seen and criticised the same horse four times in succession.

March 27th.—During the last two days the wind has left the north-east, from which bracing quarter it has uninterruptedly blown for some months, and veered round to the opposite point of the compass; gentle rains have fallen by night, and a warm sun has shone by day; crocuses now flaunt themselves in the borders where, until recently, only the pallid snowdrop blossomed, and a faint tinge of green is apparent on the more sheltered hedgerows. The first balmy breath of Spring has come timidly sighing up from the south:

" White were the moorlands,
And frozen before her:
Green were the moorlands,
And blooming behind her."

Alas! full well do I know that the moorlands will be white again and again before Spring really comes; but none the less, this transient pre-taste of it has stirred my blood like the rest of the world's, and I have been suffering from a complaint which invariably attacks me with more or less virulence about this season of the year, namely, a great desire to go a-fishing. Consequently I have to-day spent several happy, if slightly unproductive, hours in endeavouring to circumvent the crafty little trout of our local brook. This is not a stream I should select for a day's angling were any other available; it is of small volume, yet deep enough to necessitate the use of waders; it is much overgrown with trees which exact a heavy toll of one's flies, and the trout it contains are few in number, diminutive in size, and exceedingly difficult of capture. Still, *quand on n'a pas ce qu'on aime, il faut aimer ce qu'on a*, says the philosophical French proverb, and to-day I felt a positive affection for the brook. Moreover, I am always haunted by the recollection of a gigantic trout I once hooked in it, which must have weighed at least a pound, and have been the great-grandfather of every fingerling in the stream. I lost it through having no landing-net with me, but although this is a precaution I have never since omitted, on no occasion have I again seen that enormous fish, which afflicts me much as the one-eyed perch did the unhappy angler in Bulwer Lytton's novel.

To-day, although I had but little sport in the strict sense of the word, *i.e.* catching fish, I enjoyed to the

full all the other pleasures of angling. It was good to be abroad in the soft spring sunshine, and to listen to the birds singing from pure enjoyment of life; it was pleasant once more to feel ten feet of greenheart springing from one's very wrist, and, above all, to experience that delightful sensation of "uncertainty" which constitutes the chief charm of angling, and which, in my opinion, is only enjoyed in its perfection by the wet-fly fisherman on a rapid stream. One never knows in such circumstances what one's next cast may bring forth; it may, and probably will, be fruitless; it may be "only a little one"; it may be the monster of one's dreams. This is a pleasure denied to the scientific dry-fly angler of the chalk streams, who, as often as not, makes a thorough inspection of his quarry before he attempts to catch it, and then possibly spends an hour in the endeavour. I readily admit the superior skill and patience required for such a performance, but speaking from experience of both styles, I must confess to a humiliating preference for what is contemptuously styled the "chuck and chance it" method.

I admit, however, that when I returned home this afternoon my basket might reasonably have excited the scornful derision of one of these chalk-stream scientists, for it contained but six little fish, whose united weight scarce totalled twenty-four ounces. Still, I had to work hard for even these meagre results; I have reduced the violence of my angling fever; my limbs ache pleasantly from the unaccustomed exercise of wading and casting, and I look forward to enjoying the sound sleep of all

good anglers, with the pleasant prospect of finding my victims crisply fried on to-morrow's breakfast-table.

March 28th.—I am told the village ale-house is the place for news, an assertion which a deplorable class-prejudice prevents me from verifying; but give me the post-office. Heaven forbid that I should suggest any tampering with His Majesty's mails on the part of good Mrs. Brown, our post-mistress, who divides her time between serving the State, and bartering American bacon and Danish margarine against coin of the realm. Still, even the nicest sense of honour could hardly take exception to the axiom that postcards are public property; while a *very* evenly-balanced conscience might apply the same train of reasoning to the contents of telegrams of local interest. Perhaps there exists some subtle association of ideas inseparable from the vocation of a post-mistress, for I fancy that but few customers ever cross the well-worn threshold of Mrs. Brown's cottage without returning the richer for some more or less interesting information as to their neighbour's affairs. Nay, being no more than human myself, I confess to a pleasurable feeling of anticipation whenever I personally visit her emporium.

However, when I called this afternoon for my weekly provision of stamps, I found it was baking-day with Mrs. Brown, who naturally had neither time nor stomach for conversation on so momentous an occasion, so that while she was executing my order with a very floury hand, I had to fall back on the perusal of the imposing list of specially protected wild-birds which hung in the corner of the post-office.

I don't think there is much chance of any one killing an American Quail or a Solan-goose in our neighbourhood, but for aught I know to the contrary, it may be possible to bag a Boxie, a Coulter-neb, a Murre, a Plover's Page, a Marrot, a Tarrock, or a Tystey; and I admit that the prospect of doing so might lead the most blameless of shooters to set the law at defiance.

What are these extraordinary birds whose names sound like a selection from one of Lewis Carroll's books, and where are they to be found? The last on the list sounds like a Cockney idiom for something good to eat, which it possibly is. I suppose they are local names for different varieties of sea-fowl.

March 31st.—Belinda has just come in from her fortnightly visit to the old women at the workhouse, and told me an anecdote of her pet *protégée*, Nancy Baverstock. Nancy is a very old woman, who has outlived all her relatives and contemporaries, and been an inmate of the workhouse for more years than any one can remember. Although her bodily health is still good, her mind is a blank on most subjects other than her infirmities or her food; yet with the innate courtesy of the old-fashioned English peasant, she never fails to ask after the various members of Belinda's family, whose names she can recollect. Being told to-day that "Master Harry had gone to the war"—in Somaliland—she lifted her hands in horror. "Eh! poor young gentleman," she said, "I do hope he'll be careful of hisself: them *Rooshuns* is a tarrible bad lot!"

Poor old Nancy! her recollection of wars and tumults stopped short with the Crimean War.

APRIL

April 1st.—I am a consistent supporter of most customs hallowed by antiquity: I eat pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, and goose on Michaelmas Day; I raise no objection to the annual display of amateur pyrotechny, which takes place in the stable-yard on the fifth of every November; I turn the money in my pocket when I see the new moon; and I accept with caution all statements made to me before noon to-day. That other members of my household share this feeling of circumspection was unexpectedly revealed to me this morning, for, having occasion to desire the presence of Thomas the gardener, I sent word to him to that effect by Mary the housemaid, and, my window being open, I was the unseen auditor of the following colloquy. Thomas is not only an old bachelor, but a misogynist at perpetual variance with the maid-servants, against whom he constantly prefers more or less well-founded charges of larceny of fruit or flowers. Thus, to him, pottering about the cucumber frames, comes Mary, gathering her skirts about her ankles as though in the neighbourhood of some unclean animal, and addresses him in that shrill, peculiarly aggravating, tone adopted by the gentler sex of the lower classes, when giving an

order to any one they dislike: “Thomas, the master wishes to see you *at once*.”

The old gentleman paid not the slightest heed to this command, but placidly continued his occupation as though unconscious of any person being in his vicinity. Then Mary, still more shrilly, “Thomas, do you hear me! The master wishes to see you *at once*.” Again, absolute indifference on the part of Thomas, but after a third summons, accompanied by a stamp of the foot, he turned slowly round, and glaring angry-eyed at his tormentress, informed her in language more forcible than I can reproduce verbatim, that when she had seen as many April fool’s days as himself, experience would teach her not to try and play “monkey tricks” on her betters.

April 3rd.—A brace of kingfishers have taken up their quarters on the brook; the first I have seen there for a long time, though they used to be fairly common some years ago. These have evidently come to stay; indeed, I think I have already located the exact position of their nest, and I am so pleased to see them, that I cheerfully forgive them their depredations among the none too numerous trout-fry. There used to be a tradition of my boyhood that the British Museum would give a hundred pounds—a sum we urchins used to mention with bated breath—for a kingfisher’s nest and eggs intact: a tradition that must have been handed down through successive generations of schoolboys, for, I remember, it is mentioned in “Tom Brown’s

Schooldays." I suppose there must once have been some grounds for the idea, and yet it seems to me the reward would not have been difficult of obtainment. Possibly the offer was a sort of "catch-bait" on the part of the Museum authorities, as although I have never seen one, I believe a kingfisher's nest to be merely a few layers of decaying fish-bones, which it would be impossible to remove uninjured.

A kingfisher is certainly a very beautiful creature, probably by common consent the most beautiful of all our indigenous British birds; but its beauty consists solely in the brilliancy of its plumage—wherein it is hard pressed by the yaffil—and in repose it is clumsy and lacking in elegance, while its note is a mere harsh squeak. Yet nothing is more exquisite than its colouring, as it flashes downstream on a sunny day.

April 6th.—With Belinda to the Hunt Steeplechases, an annual festivity regarded by the young ladies of all classes in the country-side with much the same feeling as is Ascot by their more fashionable sisters of the London season. The most gorgeous of hats, the most knowing of "tailor-made" costumes are prepared for the occasion; and dire is the mortification felt, in hall and farm-house alike, when the day turns out wet.

However, to-day the weather was all that could be desired, and everything passed off well, even to the extent of fortune favouring my exceedingly modest speculations. The days have long passed for me when I could imagine no more maddening music than the

“shouting of the Captains,” and I have arrived at that philosophical time of life when it is possible to place the curb of discretion in the mouth of inclination; and to obtain as much satisfaction in hazarding a few shillings on the comparative speed of two inferior steeple-chase horses, as might formerly have been derived from the investment of as many pounds on the favourite for the Derby. Moreover, I now receive an additional gratification to which I was once a stranger, by the flutter which my speculations excite in Belinda’s bosom. Like all women, she is at heart a gambler, but she is equally possessed by the feminine fondness for small economies; and with her the fear of losing more than counterbalances the hope of winning.

I must confess that I thoroughly enjoy these little provincial steeplechases, which partake more of the nature of a picnic than a race-meeting: true, the sport, judged by Liverpool standard, may not be very high-class, but, after all, one horse-race is very like another; while, if the jockeyship displayed is not very brilliant—one rider this afternoon completed the last three furlongs of the course astride his horse’s withers instead of his saddle—it at all events adds to the gaiety of the spectators. The most amusing race of the day is the one for tenant farmers who hunt with the local hounds, which invariably brings forth some astounding exhibitions of horse-flesh, horsemanship, and costume. It is a point of honour with each competitor to go the whole three miles at top-speed from start to finish; to complete the full course, no matter how long he take in doing

so, and, even if a dozen horses have passed the post in front of him, to indulge in a punishing finish up the straight.

None the less, despite the pleasure these little steeple-chase meetings afford me, I am ungrateful enough to be privately of opinion that, unless some radical improvement be made in their surroundings, they are better abolished. They merely pander to the modern craving for excitement of every, or any, description, and their very insignificance practically invites roguery. Take, for instance, the programme of to-day's racing: there were six events, of which one alone was of the value of £50; another of £40, and the remainder of £30 each; and I will defy the most subtle casuist to prove how such stakes can recoup an owner for the expense of buying or breeding, training, and running, a race-horse.

This point would be more or less immaterial were these petty steeplechase meetings the amusement of the wealthy patrons of the turf; but unfortunately, they owe their main support to an entirely different class of owner; as, for example, a man who won one of the smaller races to-day. He is what is termed a "sporting" publican at X.; though I should prefer to dub him a "gambling" one, as the only sports with which he concerns himself are those where money can be made by the laying, or taking, of odds. He claimed the horse that won to-day out of a selling-race on the flat last autumn, and thus, in addition to its original cost, must have been at considerable expense for its training, schooling, and other incidental expenses. Before win-

ning a hurdle-race, of the value of £40, to-day, it had run three times unsuccessfully this season, and as by a polite fiction he is supposed to have already paid his jockey nearly a fourth of this sum, his net *legitimate* winnings over the transaction would be about £30, an amount that would show a very poor balance against his expenditure during the last few months. A man in his position cannot naturally afford to race on such unbusinesslike lines as these, and as a matter of course he looks to betting to recoup himself for his outlay. Now betting is not an ennobling pursuit: far from it; but if a man does not risk more than he can honestly afford to pay in the event of losing, it is a matter between himself and his own conscience, and concerns no one else. It merely affords him the same pleasurable excitement that speculation on the Stock Exchange, or the pursuit of bargains in old china, or first editions, do to differently constituted people.

But the class of owners to which I am now referring treat betting not as an amusement but as a business; they keep race-horses for the sole purpose of making money by betting on, or against, them, and this is a state of affairs impossible of vindication. At the small meetings where they run their horses, it is impossible for them to obtain a remunerative market about a horse whose winning form has been once fully exposed; to quote their own vernacular, they "can't afford to buy money"; and consequently their horses win, not when they can, but when it suits their owners' purpose to allow them to do so.

A remedy for such a state of things is not easily suggested, but it seems to me that it might be obtained by increasing the value of stakes, and allowing no open steeplechase to be of less value than £200. This would at once knock on the head half the steeplechase meetings in England, and certainly obliterate those little fixtures which are the happy hunting-ground of the "small" betting owners; thereby, no doubt, provoking a storm of remonstrance from them and a large section of the general public as well. As a compensatory measure I would encourage Hunt meetings, and give far greater latitude to Point-to-Point racing, restricting, however, both classes of events to landowners, farmers, and hunting-men, generally, within a certain prescribed area. This would enable men who regard steeplechasing as a sport to indulge in it at a moderate cost; while, on the other hand, it would act as a salutary check on those who merely adopt it as a means of making money by more or less dubious methods.

April 7th.—Belinda and I have spent this afternoon in quest of plovers' eggs: a pursuit we often indulge in at this season of the year, but from which I never return without the firm conviction that, like the poet, the successful "plover-egger" is born, and not made. For while I, in the whole course of my life, have never found a dozen plovers' eggs in a day, the vicar, who is twenty years my senior, and short-sighted to boot, thinks nothing of finding as many in a couple of hours. Nor can I acquire his art of doing so, though I have often accompanied him on his rambles in the hope of learning

it. It appears to be a sort of natural instinct which, moreover—but this must be sheer luck—always seems to guide him to those nests which are worth robbing; for once these contain their full complement of four eggs, the latter are invariably addled, and unfit to take, but the vicar, good man, always “throws threes.” Personally, being a firm believer in the doctrine that virtue never goes unrewarded, I ascribe his good fortune to the fact that he always leaves one egg in the nest as a sort of salve to his conscience; while he further tempers success with magnanimity by freely sharing his spoils with such of his flock as possess sufficiently educated palates to appreciate them.

When one considers the incessant persecution to which peewits are subject, whether in the egg or the flesh, one can only marvel at their reproductive power as a race. I have never shot a lapwing myself, nor do I remember to have ever seen any one else do so, but enormous quantities of them are supplied—chiefly from Holland, I believe—to the London market. Hence, they re-appear in fashionable restaurants, where they are served, and charged, as golden plover; an imposition easily detected if one has an opportunity of seeing their feet, as the peewit has four toes, and the golden plover but three. However, this little difficulty is easily overcome by the *maître-d'hôtel* who understands his business, as he snips off their legs, and supplies his patrons with *pluviers en caisses*.

Still I am sure plovers are not so plentiful as they used to be; and I now have to pay eighteenpence, instead of,

as formerly, a shilling, a dozen for their eggs to the youth of the neighbourhood. I admit, however, this may be due as much to the march of education as to scarcity of peewits. It is said that rooks' eggs are equal in flavour to plovers', but I have never tested the truth of the assertion, nor do I believe it. I once ventured on a gull's egg, which enjoys the same reputation, and found it to have as much resemblance in flavour to a peewit's as a Dutch cheese has to Stilton.

To-day Belinda and I found five eggs; an awkward number to divide impartially between two people; and I foresee what actors term a "short scene" of polite dissimulation when they appear on the dinner-table.

♦

April 8th.—I had arranged to go to the Point-to-Point races near X. to-day; but, the morning turning out wet, I not very unwillingly decided to stay at home, for this is a form of sport to which I am not particularly addicted. I should dearly like to see a revival of the original form of steeplechasing, when men were set to find their way over so many miles of "unflagged" country to some famous landmark, but the attempt to combine this idea with adjuncts of a modern steeple-chase meeting does not appeal to me. I am told that nowadays the country does not lend itself to "blindfold" racing: high farming, the increase of population, and the growth of railways are all urged as insuperable obstacles to it; but I am afraid that the real impediment lies in the refusal of the youth of the present generation to play except to a gallery. My experience of the ordinary Point-to-Point race is that it is invariably

arranged with a view to this, and would be dubbed very poor fun if such were not the case. Yet surely such an event should be of a severely sporting character, requiring neither the presence of a band, nor a Ring, nor of wagonettes full of beautiful ladies dispensing lunch, all of which were deemed necessary adjuncts to the last meeting of this nature I attended; but as I gave a shilling to the band, lost a sovereign to a gentleman in a white opera-hat and a suit of shepherd's-plaid check, and partook greedily of a free and most excellent lunch, I confess I can hardly be held to practise what I preach.

It cleared up in the afternoon, and I walked into M. to buy some sealing-wax. Overtaken by a heavy shower on my way home I sought shelter under a hedge, where I was presently joined by another wayfarer, a sort of better-class tramp, with whom I entered into conversation over a pipe of my tobacco, and found him most excellent company. He was, it appeared, a cartwright by vocation, but a wanderer—or, as he poetically preferred to style himself, “a rolling-stone”—by predilection. Indeed, he harped so persistently on his “rolling” propensities that I at last began to fancy that I had had the rare good fortune to fall in with a sort of modern Marco Polo, and, by way of leading up to some interesting anecdotes of America or the Antipodes, asked my new acquaintance if he had ever been out of England. “Oh, yes,” he cheerfully replied, “I was once three months in the Isle of Wight.”

April 21st.—It has always been a moot point with me whether keener pleasure be felt by the dweller in great

cities who takes a holiday in the country, or, *cæteris paribus*, by the denizen of the latter when visiting the town. In the days of my youth, when I used to inhabit the Metropolis for more or less lengthy periods of time, I would have unhesitatingly pronounced in favour of the former, but now that I spend most of the year in the country I have considerably modified my opinion. Consequently when Belinda, fired by an announcement that her dressmaker had just returned from a visit to Paris, recently proposed a jaunt to London, I assented by no means unwillingly, having business of my own to attend to, and being, moreover, hopeful that the east wind might rage less furiously in Piccadilly than it did at home.

It is certainly pleasant to wake up in London on a fine spring morning knowing that the day is your own ; and while breakfasting lightly off the crisp French roll, unobtainable in the country, to skim the pages of the newspaper which at home does not reach you until the afternoon. The roar of the traffic, and the selection from the last Gaiety burlesque which a piano-organ is playing round the corner, maddening and nerve-destroying as they may be to the habitual Londoner, merely serve to raise your spirits ; and it is with a feeling of pleasurable anticipation that you presently sally forth to taste that rare pleasure, only enjoyed in its perfection by the bucolic mind, of staring into shop-windows. Not, I am afraid, that Belinda contents herself with mere exterior inspection of these, judging at least by the quantity of cardboard boxes and paper parcels that daily arrived at our lodgings.

How grateful, too, the comforts of one's club: the well-drilled servants, the latest number of your favourite magazine, and the earliest edition of the evening paper; the sumptuous lunch at a cost of a couple of shillings; the easy-chair and coffee and cigar afterwards—luxuries only permitted on Sunday afternoons at home. Small wonder if the country member marvels how he ever came to quit the “sweet shady side of Pall Mall.”

Equally soothing to the jaded rustic who for months past has found his only relaxation from a *tête-à-tête* dinner at home in the tedious, if respectable, country dinner-party, to take his evening meal in a cheerful, well-lighted restaurant filled with amusing, well-dressed, and, let us charitably assume, respectable, people, and afterwards to summon the swift hansom, and drive through the roaring Strand to the theatre of his choice.

I tasted all these simple pleasures to the full; I shopped, I idled pleasantly about—why is there no English equivalent for *flâner*? I met old friends, and paid “duty” calls on London relatives; I dined, and supped, and went to the theatre; I spent my time exactly as I listed, and then, like Maeldune, and for the same reason, I

“Began to be weary, to sigh, and to stretch, and to yawn.”

I ceased to take any further interest in shop-windows or picture-galleries; I no longer stopped, open-mouthed, to gape at a horse down on the asphalte, or the sentries being relieved in Pall Mall; the club felt stuffy, and the theatres reeked of gas; the peculiar smell of the London streets, half stable and half chloride of lime, hung con-

stant in my nostrils; the ceaseless roar and clatter of the traffic oppressed me, and, leaving Belinda behind to pay a round of visits alone, I fled home to the country.

I reached home late last night, and this morning, after a leisurely breakfast which included at least one dainty absolutely unobtainable in London, a new-laid egg to wit, I decided, after the usual visit to the stable and a potter round the garden fragrant with the perfume of wall-flower and narcissus, on a morning's fishing as the most complete antidote to my recent dissipations. It was one of those perfect days when all nature seems to rejoice in the caress of spring; the tender green corn was all "a-blowing and a-growing," and the cattle in the pastures were feeding forty like one on the fresh young grass; the lambs were busy organising endless series of running and jumping competitions, and the peewits were screaming and swooping over the dusty fallows; while overhead little fleecy white clouds were drifting across a bright blue sky before the breath of the gentle west wind.

Then too delicious harmonies of the young foliage of the trees! How delicately the variations ranged, from the more sombre tints of the sycamore and the chestnut through the yellow of the oak and the soft grey of the birch to the exquisitely vivid green of the larch and balsam-poplar. Alone the cautious ash, like some misanthrope who has inadvertently strayed into a holiday crowd, refused to put forth the faintest tinge of verdure, awaiting the full glow of time before it induces its short-foliage:

"Delaying, as the tender ash delays,
To clothe herself when all the trees are green."



THE BROOK

It was good to be abroad on such a morning, and as I waded into the cool brown water of the brook, flashing and rippling over its shallows, I drew a long breath of air free from the taint of a million other lungs, and thanked God I was a countryman.

April 22nd.—To-day I rode over to H., about five miles from here, to witness the inauguration of some new golf links. In making this expedition I was more influenced by the fineness of the weather and the prospect of meeting my friends than by any extraordinary affection for the game of golf. Not, on the other hand, that I have any special dislike to it. Like the Meltonian who, when asked if he were fond of shooting, replied, "he didn't mind it when there was no hunting," so do I rather enjoy a game of golf when I can find nothing better to do; and, in view of the fascination it possesses for its more elderly votaries, I recognise that the day cannot now be far distant when I shall come to regard it with positive affection. No; my chief objection to the modern craze for the game is the way in which it has ruined—to my egotistical mind at least—so many formerly, delightfully quiet bits of country. This very common at H. is a case in point. It used to be a fine, breezy bit of gorse-grown upland, over which as a boy I had leave from old Mr. P., the lord of the manor, to roam in search of birds' nests, or later, when I became promoted to a gun, in pursuit of the occasional snipe or still more occasional rabbit. One could spend a whole afternoon there and never meet another living soul. Now it has been given

over to a swarm of red-jacketed fanatics from the nearest town, who, not content with ruthlessly uprooting the gorse, have further desecrated the face of nature by digging artificial "bunkers," and erecting a hideous iron pavilion; while the small boys of the district are seduced from their legitimate agricultural vocations to become "caddies."

Worst of all, this new departure draws the young men away from the cricket-field. I firmly believe golf does as much harm to cricket among the upper classes as bicycling does to volunteering among the lower ones. Had I the powers of a Dictator I would make it a penal offence for any Englishman under the age of twenty-five to play golf—I suppose exception would have to be made in the case of Scotchmen as following hereditary instinct—for even its most ardent votaries must allow that golf does not call forth those qualities of nerve, unselfishness, and personal courage, demanded by the nobler game.

In giving vent to the above diatribe I feel rather a graceless individual, for I spent a most cheery afternoon at H. among the "red-jacketed fanatics," and enjoyed an excellent lunch at their expense in the odious iron pavilion, where, needless to remark, I kept my abominable sentiments to myself.

April 26th.—I basely took advantage of Belinda's protracted absence from home to abstain from attendance at church this morning, and walked over to lunch with A., who told me a good story of his Irish keeper.

A. got a snap-shot—both barrels—at a cock disappearing round the corner of a covert, and not knowing whether he had hit or missed, turned to his attendant and asked, “Did I get that bird?” “Ye did, sorr,” replied the keeper, “ye struck ut with the sicond retaliation.”

April 27th.—“Give a dog a bad name” is a very old and true adage; and since wolves became extinct in England I suppose no countryman ever missed a lamb or hen without attributing its disappearance to foxes. Consequently I was a good deal astonished to-day when old Mr. Sadgrove, whose farm extends along the banks of the river, informed me that otters had been “playing havick” with his ducks. This was the first time I had ever heard such an accusation brought against otters; and I confess to having myself pandered to popular sentiment, and hinted that a fox was the probable culprit; but old Sadgrove scouted the notion. “He had lost too much poultry in his time”—a statement amply corroborated by the Hunt balance-sheets—“not to know a fox’s work when he seen it; it was them nasty otters and nothen’ else as ‘ad done it.”

Pressed for evidence of this, the old fellow admitted to no personal proof; but declared that only last week his “Missus” heard a duck “squawking and carrying on” on the river-bank, and hurrying to the spot had found a sorely-mangled, but still breathing, bird, and seen a “kind ’er brown hanimal” slip into the water. On the face of it, this indictment of otters is vague in the extreme,

but, on the other hand, I see no reason why it should not be true. Otters are indisputably both rapacious and carnivorous, while most animals will, on occasion, eat things not apparently intended for them in Nature's dietary. Squirrels will eat fledgling birds, and badgers very young rabbits; I know from personal experience that cows will devour fish incautiously left on the bank by a careless angler; I have seen a tame deer eat tobacco with apparent enjoyment, and I once had a terrier that would drink beer.

Otters, like badgers, are so rarely seen, that few people are aware how plentiful they are: indeed, although I have been an angler all my life, I have certainly never seen a wild otter a dozen times in the flesh. Personally, I believe their depredations to be greatly exaggerated; but they are a horrible pest on a salmon river, where the mere fact of their presence has the most terrifying influence on the fish.

Not many years ago I spent a lazy, happy, Sunday afternoon by the side of a salmon river just fining down after a spate. The flood had brought up a run of fish, and the pool by which I was seated was full of them; hardly a minute passed but a salmon, or more frequently, a grilse, flung itself out of the water: it was a delight to watch them. Then suddenly, as if by magic, not a fish showed itself; and I supposed that one of those subtle atmospheric changes, to which fish are so peculiarly sensitive, was at work, when the *origo mali* suddenly revealed itself. A sleek, wicked, head rose ghost-like out of the water, and an otter swam lazily to a flat rock

on the far side of the river, whereon it lay until it became aware of my vicinity. Then it slipped noiselessly and gracefully into the water, and was seen no more. I sat by the river for another hour, yet never a fish moved again, and I doubt if one did so that evening. Now if this had taken place on a week-day instead of the Sabbath, what could have been more distressing to the contemplative man coming to this pool to enjoy his recreation than to find every fish it contained cowering under the rocks at the bottom of the river, insensible to the most attractive fly or toothsome prawn?

Still we have so few really wild animals left in England that I am always sorry to hear them condemned, for even the most rapacious have their redeeming qualities in preserving the balance of Nature. Foxes eat far more rats than they do fowls; otters prefer eels to any other kind of fish; and eels are singularly destructive brutes in salmon rivers—granted that the harmless badger devours a few rabbits, an animal we can cheerfully dispense with, it equally rids us of a host of crawling pests; while most hawks are far more destructive to field-mice than game.

Coming home this evening I met old Robert Douthwaite, the only inhabitant of the village who has ever been to London; a fact which naturally causes him to give himself airs of superiority over his less fortunate brethren. Consequently, whenever he hears that I have been in London, he dearly loves to waylay me in the village street, or, better still, in the churchyard on Sunday, in order that they may see how much the travelled have in common.

Dowthwaite is an importation into these parts; a Yorkshireman of Yorkshiremen who for many years was bailiff and factotum to old Mr. A., and who now lives a life of gilded ease on his savings and a pension. Not long before he retired from service his master treated him to a jaunt to the Metropolis, which he appears to have explored from Dan to Beersheba, or say, from the Agricultural Hall at Islington to the Crystal Palace. Yet of all the many "sights" to which his kind master treated him, and which ranged from the Strangers' Gallery of the House of Commons to Madame Tussaud's, but a single one, the meat market at Smithfield, appears to have either gratified or impressed the phlegmatic Dowthwaite. Least of all did he appreciate an evening at the play, whither he was despatched under the care of Mr. A.'s butler, and where he appears to have been most intensely bored. Indeed, I have never yet discovered either the name of the theatre he visited, or of the piece he witnessed, though I gather the latter must have been a melodrama. All I can extract from Robert is, that "theer were far ower mony fowk on t' staage; a body cannot mind them arl at once. Theer was a rich owd chep got knocked on t' heid at first start-off; an' afterwards arl t' oother hed a rare carry-on whe should collar t' owd man's brass!"

But despite Dowthwaite's shortcomings as a dramatic critic, his visit to London has provided him with a store of anecdote that yet earns him no little reputation in local circles. Still, he gives me to understand that some of his experiences—possibly perfectly veracious ones—

have proved incapable of absorption by rustic intelligence, and he shares the galling stigma of mendacity, from which no traveller ever has been, nor ever will be, exempt.

I remember a parallel case to old Robert's, of a boatman on a famous Norwegian salmon-river: one of those delightful beings such as Highland stalkers, or Tyrolese guides, that, in my experience, are only to be found in mountainous countries; men who mix on terms of perfect equality with their masters, yet never forget their respective positions, nor take a liberty. Nils, the man in question, was the best specimen of them I have ever met, the result, apart from innate good breeding, of having acted for many years as the companion of the best class of English sportsmen. One of these once invited him to spend the winter at his country-house in the West of England, and of the glories of that visit Nils was never tired of descanting, but *not* to his compatriots. "It no goot me telling deni what I see in England," he would ruefully remark, "dey only tink me a liar."

Next to the wealth and fertility of England, the two things which impressed him most were a covert-shoot, where he saw a thousand pheasants slain in one day, and a visit to Chester Races. "Oh, my!" (his favourite interjection) he used to say, "how dose horses gallop! I vould not like to be a shockey."

April 28th.—To Petty Sessions, where an incident occurred which showed at once the smallness of the world, and the largeness of the British Empire. My coadjutor

on the Bench was B., a retired Colonel of Foot, who for many years of his life served her late Majesty in various parts of the globe. Before us was presently arraigned John Smith, labourer, of no fixed address, charged with the heinous offence of sleeping in Farmer Turnbull's straw-barn. He stood motionless and indifferent, while the policeman in the witness-box detailed how, "in consequence of information received, he proceeded in the direction of Mr. Turnbull's farm"—a policeman never *goes* to a place; he proceeds in its direction—and found the prisoner asleep in the straw; of how the man used bad language when awakened—as who might not in the circumstances?—but went quietly to the lock-up; of how he charged him, and searched him, and found on him three halfpence and a pipe, but no tobacco.

And then came the question what to do with him? It is always hard to deal with these homeless and hopeless outcasts, who, as often as not, have drifted into their present state through sheer ill-fortune; and I, for one, can never meet them shambling along the roads in their burst boots without thinking of the words of the wise old preacher: "There, but for the grace of God, goes Richard Baxter." There was nothing about John Smith, ragged, collarless, and unshorn, to suggest to me that he had ever been anything else but a tramp, but something about the way he folded his hands in front of him as he stood in the dock, caught B.'s practised eye.

"You have been in the army, haven't you?" he asked. It was curious to see how the man came to attention; his shoulders straightened, his hands dropped instinctively

to his sides, and he looked hard at B. as he answered, “Yes.”

“What regiment were you in?”

“The ——th Fusiliers.” (B.’s old regiment.)

“When were you discharged?”

“At Allahabad in 1889.”

“What Company were you in?”

“H Company.”

“Who was your Captain?”

“You were, Sir!”

And then, encouraged to speak, John Smith told his story of how he had served twelve years with the Colours, and been through the Burmese War; of how he had once got his stripes and lost them through “a matter of drink”; of how he had come home and married, and settled down to steady work for nearly thirteen years; of how sickness had come on him and his wife, culminating in her death and the loss of his work; of how his home had been broken up, and he had come down in the world; finally, of how he had left his only child with a compassionate friend in London, and was tramping to Carlisle, where he had good hopes of getting employment.

It was a pitiful tale, and, I fear, not an uncommon one. Here was a man—it might have been Private Stanley Ortheris himself, for his speech bewrayed him a Cockney—who had

“. . . heard the revelly
From Birr to Bareilly,”

who had seen strange countries and stranger men, who had marched and fought beneath tropical skies, and added

his tiny brick to the great edifice of the Empire; now, homeless and penniless, walking three hundred miles to seek work; while I, who had only fulfilled the obligations of citizenship by paying taxes, and grumbling at having to do so, was sitting in judgment on him, and ought, if I did my duty, to send him to prison for fourteen days. But this was not to be, and so John Smith, formerly full private in His Majesty's —th Regiment of Fusiliers, and now labourer of no fixed address, was dismissed with a caution, and also, I have reason to believe, with a small packet, the contents of which would enable him to add tobacco to his lonely pipe in his pocket, and to reach Carlisle by rail.

April 29th.—My peace of mind has of late been much disturbed by, on the one side, the insidious pleadings of Thomas, and on the other, the imperative wishes of Belinda, though, needless to add, the latter have carried the day. This, too, in the face of a slight personal bias towards Thomas's side of the point at issue, which is due to the appearance of a most unwonted and unwarrantable number of bullfinches in the garden. Now, apart from its exquisite plumage, I do not consider the bullfinch to have any special claim on my consideration; it is not a song-bird, and during the greater part of the year does not even seek to please by a display of its fine feathers, but lives in retirement in the woods, whence it issues with the approach of spring to wreak the most outrageous havoc in my garden. Even as the lover of oysters hails the advent of September, so does the epicurean

bullfinch greet the appearance of the buds on the fruit-trees, and, beginning with the early gooseberries, works its dastardly way steadily through the currants and cherries, until it finishes the season with the Victoria plums and greengages. Now this is no doubt excellent fun for the bullfinches, but the humour of it does not appeal to me, who am fond of fruit in its due season, and I was half inclined to yield to Thomas's prayer to be allowed to shoot some of the marauders. But to this Belinda offered the most strenuous opposition, based on the sentimental grounds of her having formerly kept a pet bullfinch in a cage; a far more cruel proceeding to my mind than the shooting of a wild bird which is injuring one's fruit-trees. However *ce que femme veult, &c.*, so the fiat has gone forth the bullfinches are to have what they like; and I suppose that, for the second year in succession, I shall eat no white-heart cherries of my own growing. As a matter of fact, I know quite well I should not have sanctioned Thomas's bloodthirsty proposals, for, apart from one's natural dislike to killing any small bird, I feel there may be something in Belinda's contention, that some regard should be paid to one that can be taught to pipe and draw its own water-supply in a miniature bucket.

There is no country in the world where birds are so jealously preserved as our own; and nothing is more astonishing to the Englishman who finds himself in a continental wood than the almost total absence of feathered life. I have walked for hours in the Black Forest and only seen a kite, a bird, which, on the other

hand, would be marked out for immediate destruction in England. No doubt this lack of song-birds in foreign countries is due to the fact that they are killed for food; a custom happily repugnant to our insular ideas. None the less, thrushes and field-fares are excellent fare; and many a Briton, who would repudiate with disgust a proposal to eat the thrushes that dig up worms from his lawn, smacks his lips over *tordi* at Milan or Florence, in happy ignorance that they are one and the same bird. Not that the baser sort of foreigners confine themselves to such delicate morsels as *tordi* and *beccaficci*. I once noticed hawks and carrion-crows hanging on a game-stall in the market at Turin; and an Italian friend, to whom I commented on the fact, assured me that, disguised in hash or stew, they are readily eaten by the very poor!

April 30th.—Last night I dined and slept at C.'s, who has just returned from two years of sport and travel in Asia. As may be imagined, he proved most excellent company, and kept me up to such an hour in the smoking-room as made me feel on awaking this morning as though I were still in London. Two of his anecdotes seem to me worthy of reproduction, as illustrating the different light in which things strike the Anglo-Saxon and the Gallic mind.

When in India, C., a British subaltern, and a French globe-trotter, with whom he had temporarily foregathered, happened to be travelling in the same railway carriage. In the course of their journey the train ran through a particularly dense patch of jungle. Quoth the

subaltern, gazing critically out of the right-hand window, “That would be an awkward place to force a boar out of.” Shrieked the Frenchman, in a crescendo note of admiration, as he gazed out of the window on his side, “*Ah, mon Dieu! regardez donc, mes amis, quel luxe de végétation!*”

On another occasion C. was travelling on a *Messageries Maritimes* boat; and, finding time hang heavy on his hands, got his battery up on deck, and proceeded to carefully oil his rifles. A certain French Colonel of *Tirailleurs*, who was a fellow-passenger, was much struck by an 8-bore rifle, and asked for what purpose he used such an enormous “carabine.” “*Pour la chasse aux éléphants,*” replied C. “*La chasse aux éléphants,*” repeated the Colonel, in a tone in which incredulity mingled with admiration; “*Sapristi! voilà une chasse d’émotion!*”

MAY

May 5th.—I have seen a May fox killed: a thing, by the way, more often talked about than done. I am staying with some north-country friends for a few days' trout-fishing, and on the very eve of my departure from home received a mysterious telegram to “Bring some hunting-things;” so mufti breeches, and blucher-boots, formed an incongruous addition to waders and brogues; while a crop-stick presented, as it seemed to me, rather a shame-faced appearance when strapped up with a bundle of fishing-rods. The hospitable house to which I was bidden lies in one of those favoured north-country valleys, the fortunate inhabitants of which can enjoy, within ten miles of their front-doors, almost every sport obtainable within the United Kingdom, deer-stalking excepted. A great nobleman hunts the fox four days a week without subscription; a lesser territorial magnate pursues the timid hare on the same terms on “off-days”; the higher portion of the dale includes some of the best grouse moors in the world, which slope down to a famous salmon and trout river; in fine, to a man who can cheerfully brave the climate of the northern portion of our islands, there can be no more desirable place of residence.

To-day the meet was on the high ground towards the
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head of the dale ; and as we jogged quietly along to covert, I could not help noticing how the vegetation altered as our road rose higher and higher above the valley. Oaks and beeches soon gave way to sycamores and ashes, and Scotch firs and larches gradually took the place of these ; tillage fields became less and less frequent until they were entirely absorbed in the universal green of the upland pastures ; rough-stone walls superseded quick-set hedges, and the air grew stronger and keener with every mile of ascent. And what a view we got when we finally reached our tryst, a dense fir plantation on the very summit of a great green hill, whence the ground fell away on all sides ! Beneath us the low country stretched for miles, shivering and simmering in the haze of the noonday heat, through which the river shone like a trickle of quicksilver ; and above us brown moors rolled vast and mysterious as far as the eye could reach. I was assured that on a clear day one could make out the towers of the great Minster forty miles away across the plain ; and though I privately opined that it must require a very clear day, and a very powerful telescope, to do so, I none the less liked to think it was possible.

This late meet had been arranged in deference to the entreaties of the farmers of the neighbourhood, with a view to catching a certain notorious old fox, whose ravages on their hen-roosts had passed the limits of bucolic forbearance. He was reputed to generally inhabit the very wood where we met, where, indeed, hounds quickly found him, but it was a long time before he could be induced to leave his home, whereby

he undoubtedly sealed his own doom; for to be hustled for an hour up and down a thick fir plantation on a hot May morning cannot but have an exhausting effect on an elderly fox of full habit. I viewed him myself, crossing a ride, long before he was eventually holloa'd away, and even then his knavish tongue was hanging piteously out.

When at last he was forced to quit the covert, his line took us over enormous undulating enclosures of short green turf, divided by great stone walls—"dry-stane dykes" in the local vernacular—rendered unjumpable by a strand of wire run along their top to prevent the black-faced sheep of the district trespassing on their neighbour's pasturage. Consequently we were only called on to adopt what Whyte-Melville used to style a "New-market seat," and gallop from one gate to another, a safe and exhilarating form of exercise, where "the best is as the worst"; but a mile or two of which brought us to some moorland where the going was treacherous, and where it became a case of "follow my leader."

I was not sorry when our fox turned to try and get back to the covert where we found him, for the crumbling peat-hags and quaking mosses presented unaccustomed terrors to my south-country mind, and, I am afraid, made me communicate some of my nervousness to the steady old hunter I was riding. More big grass enclosures, a scramble through a gap into a tiny tillage-field—what on earth was it doing up there?—a momentary check in a larch-grown ravine, more grass again, and then, with one great scream of melody, hounds ran from scent to view.

Poor old fox! He lay down on the far side of the next wall, and gained a moment's respite as the eager pack flashed over him; next we saw him crawling along its flat top, snarling weary defiance at the shrieking, baying, hounds that were leaping and snapping at him, till one of them caught him by the brush, and then:

“ ‘Twas a stout hill-fox when they found him,
Now ’tis a hundred tatters of brown.”

A *stout* hill-fox he most undoubtedly was, for, despite a grey muzzle and almost toothless jaws, I never saw a fatter. Yet none the less, on the sworn testimony of every farmer present, the most notorious old hen-killer in the country-side.

It is always these fat old foxes, that are too infirm or lazy to hunt wild things for their food, that swell the Hunt poultry bills; they hang round farm-houses, and scavenge on the middens for refuse, and soon learn how much easier and pleasanter it is to pick up a fat hen or turkey, than to spend an hour crawling up a nasty wet ditch on the chance of a rat or rabbit.

May 8th.—Much as I enjoyed my day's hunting, I have enjoyed my fishing more. Every morning since I came here I have been packed into a pony-trap after breakfast, and driven miles up or down stream, to be then left to my own devices for the rest of the day; with no attendant keeper to vex me with clumsy, if well-meant, attentions; with leagues of preserved water before me and not a soul on it but myself; above all

with the knowledge that the whole soft spring day was my own to spend as I listed by the beautiful river. While life can afford me such simple pleasures as these, I desire no greater ones. What a charming river it was, typical of scores of others in the bonny North country, running between gentle sheep-trimmed hills, backed by the purple moors. It flowed under cliffs of limestone, where gnarled, ivy-grown ash-trees sprang from the crannies of the rock; through fat pastures, where great short-horned cattle came to drink of its waters; under hanging woods of tenderest green, and between low sandy banks hidden beneath masses of campion and willow-herb and huge umbrageous burdocks. Sometimes it slid gently over a bed of smooth, flat rock; sometimes it rippled and flashed

“With many a silvery water-break
Above the golden gravel,”

over a pebbly bed; it widened out into deep, still reaches, where its lazy current was scarce perceptible; it ran through narrow gorges where its stream, streaked and flecked with floating foam, raced black and irresistible. Water-ousels—most friendly of birds—piped and flitted from stone to stone; wood-pigeons cooed softly from the woods; jackdaws quarrelled and chattered in the cliffs; and once a kingfisher, flashing and shining like a piece of gorgeous enamel, perched so close to me that I could almost have touched it with my rod.

I have spent five happy days among these surroundings, days of pure enjoyment. If there *was* a thorn to my

rose, it was that the weather was rather too fine from an angler's point of view, but to me this only proved an additional source of pleasure. After all there was hardly an hour in the day when the trout did not rise more or less freely, and though they did not run very large—my biggest fish weighed exactly 18 oz.—they were as game in the water as they were good on the table. But above all, my chief delight lay in the absolute solitude of the riverside. I only once came across another human being, a grey-headed old shepherd, with whom I foregathered over a pipe of tobacco. He was a typical north-country man ; quaint in speech, hard-headed, independent, and a bit of a sportsman to boot. We presently fell to upon fox-hunting, of which he was an ardent, if humble, supporter, and, pointing to a great, deep, pool by which we were sitting, the old fellow told me it was called Dowson's Hole, because many years ago a hard-riding farmer of that name had lost his life in it. Hounds had run their fox across the river, which was in high flood at the time, and of the whole field only this one man had essayed to follow them, with the melancholy result that he was swept away to perish in the pool which still bears his name. I mildly remarked that this seemed to have been rather a foolhardy feat to attempt, when my new acquaintance, eyeing me with scornful pity, curtly replied, "Mistor Dowson was pairfectly reet, he was followin' t' hoonds!" This is what we all want to do out hunting, but I fear the old shepherd's standard would be a bit too high for most of us.

I came home early from fishing this evening, and,

after tea, went for a most delightful ride with D., with whom I am staying. Not only was it delightful on account of the beauty of the evening, and of the scenery through which we rode, but especially because in my host I had a companion who can talk with authority, but without arrogance, on nearly every subject—a gift as rare as it is admirable. Although he has been a great traveller, he retains a deep affection for "*angulus iste*," the devotion to his own particular neighbourhood, which is fast ceasing to be an English characteristic; and this evening he took particular pride in pointing out local places of interest, and retailing old stories about them, one of which I give here.

As we rode home along the fringe of the moorland we crossed a large grass enclosure, almost entirely surrounded by dense thickets, which even on a perfect spring evening had a gloomy ill-omened air about it. D. told me it was locally known as "Bloody Acres," from the tradition that a handful of Highlanders, retreating from Derby in 1745, is supposed to have been butchered here. They had got separated from the main body of the Pretender's army, and, wandering helplessly northward across the moors, were surrounded on this very field, and shot down from the shelter of the adjacent woods by the country folk of the district. I am glad to say the story is exceedingly ill-authenticated, but, whether true or not, it would make a most dramatic picture, such as would have formed a splendid subject for Pettie or Millais. The little band of starving, desperate men, clad in ragged tartans and armed with

useless targe and claymore, standing back to back in the centre of the field, calling, as they are said to have done, on “the English” to come out and fight in the open “like men”; the dark belts of oak-scrub and fir lit up by the flash of their invisible assailants’ guns; under foot the trampled and blood-stained snow, and overhead the gathering gloom of the northern winter twilight!

I should much like to know the real facts of the story, which rests on the slenderest foundation, and which even D. cannot unravel. It certainly seems curious that so terrible a tragedy should remain unverified when of such comparatively recent date; but, on the other hand, it must be remembered that those responsible for it would naturally wish it kept as quiet as possible. In those days the district, which even now is very sparsely populated, was practically uninhabited, and the wretched victims were probably cast into a nameless grave on the neighbouring fells, and the whole affair hushed up, only to be referred to with bated breath. Few people can keep their own counsel better than country folk, when they deem it expedient to do so.

May 10th.—I reached home late last night only to find my worst fears confirmed. That infernal house-maid *has* taken advantage of my absence to “spring-clean” the smoking-room. I had been haunted all the week by a foreboding she would do so as soon as my back was turned, and the consequence is that it will take weeks for my sanctum to regain its habitual appear-

ance of comfort. It smells painfully clean ; the furniture has been re-arranged according to Mary's, and not my, notions of what is right ; and, worst of all, the jade has taken upon herself to dust my books. These she has replaced on their shelves, neatly classified according to their binding but not their contents ; an arrangement which has doubtless gratified her aesthetic eye, but which has produced some very ill-assorted neighbours—Boswell's "Life of Johnson" looking thoroughly ashamed of its propinquity to some re-bound novels of De Maupassant, and "Handley Cross" shouldering Mantell's "Wonders of Geology," a handsomely bound work presented to me on leaving school, which I have never yet had sufficient leisure to peruse.

I suppose spring cleanings are inevitable in all well-regulated establishments, but I don't seem to remember them when I lived in London chambers as a young man. At all events, I could always find my pet pipe when I wanted it, which I was unable to do this morning.

May 12th.—That it is unlucky to be married in May has long been a popular superstition, but to-day I have learnt for the first time that it is equally unfortunate for certain animals to be born in the same month. Last night the peace of the household was seriously affected by the hideous lamentations of poor Tib, the stable-cat ; the result, as I found on investigation this morning, of the barbarity of Thomas, who had deliberately drowned the whole of her recently-born litter of kittens. On my rebuking him for his inhumanity in not having

preserved at least one of them to satisfy Tib's maternal instinct, he expressed astonishment at my ignorance of the fact that there is nothing so unlucky as having "May kittens about a house"; and chagrin that his zeal in the welfare of my establishment should meet with so little appreciation.

I wonder what can be the origin of this superstition? Thomas can adduce no better reason than that he had always heard "May kittens was unlucky," yet I know of no other domestic animal whose birth in May is supposed to bring ill-fortune to its owner. However, I am mostly concerned about poor Tib, and should be more so, did not experience lead me to anticipate that long before May comes round again she will have amply redeemed to-day's bereavement.

May 16th.—Last night to the Parish Council where, in a sitting of about twenty minutes, we completed our usual business of doing nothing with punctuality and despatch. Taking them as a whole, I am exceedingly sceptical as to the efficacy of the various Local Government Acts with which both political parties favour the country from time to time. As far as my limited experience goes, the work of purely county administration, formerly controlled by Quarter Sessions, was better and more economically carried on by the magistrates than by the powers that be; but I suppose the new democracy must be humoured, and occasionally given a fresh plaything; as, for example, the enormous and hideous red-brick edifice which has been erected in our little

county town, at a cost of many thousands of pounds to the ratepayers, for the use of the County Council. Its exterior is, as I have said, unsightly to a degree, but its interior arrangements, its council chamber, its consulting-rooms, its committee-rooms, its clerks' offices, and its library, are all furnished and decorated in the most lavish style and illuminated with the electric light. It certainly seems unnecessary to my simple understanding that the few score gentlemen who meet a few times a year to settle the finances of our little county should be so extravagantly housed; but then I am only a ratepayer, and not a County Councillor. However, I suppose it is all good for trade.

A propos of which I may mention a perfectly veracious anecdote of a "labour" representative on the Council of a neighbouring county, who, addressing his constituents when seeking re-election, summed up his services in the pithy remark, "Whenever theer's been ony mooney to be spent, ar's arlways voated for spendin' it." As three-fourths of his audience were working-men who paid no direct rates or taxes, these liberal-minded sentiments touched a most responsive chord in their bosoms.

Similarly, a good many years ago I chanced to be in one of the smaller towns of Northern Italy, where I was struck by the extraordinary number of brand-new statues, representing famous Italians of every period and degree, from Dante to Cavour, with which the little city was adorned. Commenting on this to the landlord of my hotel, I complimented him on the

patriotism of his town. “*Altro Signor!*” he replied, with a most expressive shrug of his shoulders, “it is not that we are more patriotic than our neighbours, but that our Syndic’s father-in-law is a sculptor!”

But there is one respect in which unstinted praise must be awarded to local self-government, and that is in the effect it has had on the housing of the working-classes. It is now no longer possible for any one, be he great landowner or speculative “jerry-builder,” to erect the wretched, insanitary hovels formerly deemed good enough for the labouring poor, and far too many of which still remain. Only last week, riding home through W. Park, I met my friend Captain H., the agent for the property, and at his invitation turned aside to inspect some new cattle-yards which he had just put up on the Home Farm, and of which he was reasonably proud. Indeed, they were the best of their kind I have ever seen, and I was able to render them unstinted admiration. Dry, roomy, warm, well-ventilated, and well drained, they were an ideal resting-place for the final stage of a fatted bullock’s existence.

But soon after parting from H. I presently came on the reverse of the medal, for my road led me past the cottage of one of the labourers on this very farm; a miserable one-storeyed edifice of two rooms; one the kitchen and sitting-room, the other the bedroom, where

“Man, maid, mother, and little ones lay,”

and as I rode on, two more lines from that same terrible

100 PAGES FROM A COUNTRY DIARY

indictment kept time in my mind to the rhythm of my horse's feet :—

“ Worse housed than your hacks or your pointers,
Worse fed than your hogs or your sheep.”

Long experience of both the agricultural and industrial poor has convinced me of one great fact—namely, that the better the house, the better citizen the man who lives in it.

By the way, after I had sufficiently admired his cattle-sheds, H. introduced me to his new “pupil,” a fresh-faced young man, clad in immaculate breeches and gaiters, and—although it was one of the few hot days we have had this year—with his throat swathed in a choking “twice-round” hunting-stock. He seemed a nice young fellow of exactly the same type as the dozen other public-school-bred lads I have seen pass through H.’s hands from time to time. It appeared that he had failed to pass the examination for the Army, and, rejecting such sedentary professions as commerce, or the law, had pitched on land-agency as the only career open to him. How curious it is that a man who fails in other walks of life seems to invariably consider himself naturally adapted for the care of another person’s property!

Apart from this, I have come to the conclusion that there must be some powerful magnetic influence about the profession of land-agency, for on no other grounds can I account for the fascination it seems to have for the youth of the present generation. It is admittedly one of the most difficult vocations in which to obtain

a footing, much less to succeed ; the rewards that even its most fortunate members can aspire to are comparatively meagre ; it offers an existence of uneventful respectability, without the latter's usual consequence of an easy old age ; and yet half the young fellows one comes across either adopt it, or are anxious to do so. In this they are no doubt largely influenced by the idea of an outdoor life, and of opportunity for indulgence in those sports of the field to which we are all prone to lend undue importance ; but I can hardly imagine a less ambitious career for a young man ; and youth without ambition is as poor a thing as old age without self-respect. Any would-be land-agent who obtained a post of four or five hundred a year before he was thirty would rightly be deemed fortunate, yet at sixty he will probably be "no forrader," while his contemporaries at school or college may have risen to be Generals, or Bishops, or Judges, or have amassed fortunes in business. Moreover, he can never feel the delight of fighting "for his own hand" ; his energies are necessarily devoted to furthering another man's interests ; while, no matter how agreeable his relations with his client, he can only, to put it as delicately as possible, regard himself as subject to his authority. Not, of course, that there is anything derogatory in this.

Still, *des goûts et des couleurs il ne faut jamais discuter* : the choice of a profession is largely a matter of temperament, and if a young man does not find it in him to try and make a name for himself in the world, who can blame him for electing to earn a modest competence by writing

another man's letters,¹ or managing his property? "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war;" and a land-agent has plenty of scope for doing a deal of good in his generation.

May 18th.—Among Belinda's many *protégés* in the village is a certain John Forster, an old man, who once knew better days as a sort of small farmer, but who is now in receipt of out-door relief. It appears that he is an omnivorous reader, especially of fiction, and no gift, not even tobacco, is so acceptable to him as a book. Belinda only recently discovered his literary tastes, but, since doing so, she never visits him without taking him some tattered "yellow back," which he receives with the most unfeigned gratitude. To-day she asked him the name of his favourite author, when to her astonishment he replied, "Lord Beaconsfield," adding, that of all his novels he esteemed "The Young Duke" the highest. This is not a work one would have thought could possibly have appealed to a man like old Forster, who, even in his most prosperous days was but little removed from an agricultural labourer.

¹ Some rich people must have rather elastic notions as to the responsibilities of their confidential *employés*. Only last month, when in London, I met young Smith, who was formerly a pupil with H., and who, despairing of ever obtaining a land-agency, accepted the post of factotum to a west-country magnate. In this capacity his duties appear to be of the most varied description, ranging from writing, but not compiling, the dinner *menu*, to taking a small boy to be fitted with a new suit of clothes; on which latter business I ran up against him in Regent Street. These are obligations inoffensive enough in themselves, but which seem to me a poor return for "two thousand pounds of education" at Winchester and Oxford.

However, one can never judge another's taste in literature from appearances. I once knew a famous dandy and plunger of his day, who used to derive the most intense gratification from the perusal of Miss Yonge's novels!

May 19th.—To shoot rooks at M.'s, a form of amusement for which I have very little affection. Where the nests are built in very high trees, and some skill is requisite to bring down the birds—I am of course alluding to shooting them with a pea-rifle—it can, as to-day, be made an excellent excuse for meeting one's friends and eating a copious lunch, but under no circumstances can it be dignified as a sport. However, rooks must be thinned down, and no doubt there exist people who, like the fat boy in Pickwick, have ulterior thoughts of rook-pie, a dish, the mere sight of which is sufficient to produce a feeling of nausea in me.

Arrived at M.'s, I found a large party armed with a greater variety of rifles than I should have thought it possible to collect in our peaceful country district. One guest alone, the Rector of the parish, came equipped with a shot-gun, with a view, he assured us, of only shooting such of the young birds as were able to fly and would not sit to the rifles. It is perhaps needless to remark that, once the business of the day had commenced, the good man spared neither age, nor sex, nor sitters, nor, when he could hit them, fliers. He was attended by his gardener, bearing a sack wherein to deposit the corpses of the slain; and it was a sight for

gods and men to watch the pair of them stalk a half-fledged rook clinging, squawking, to a branch scarce fifty feet above their heads. Having cautiously approached within what he considered range of it, the worthy padre, in order to obtain greater accuracy of direction, would rest his gun-barrel against the trunk of a tree, and then, closing his left eye, while the gardener shut both *his* optics, would take long and deliberate aim at the bird. Presently the gun would go off with an ear-splitting report—he used black powder in brown cartridge-cases—and the rook, or what was left of it, fall lifeless to the ground, when the gardener, who appeared somewhat of a sycophant, invariably exclaimed, “Bewtiful, Sir!” and placing it in the sack, accompanied his master in search of another victim.

It is such little incidents as these that serve to *égayer* the poor fun of rook-shooting; while the good rector was so enthusiastic on his sport, and took our chaff so well, that we could not but respect him. I wish more parsons were sportsmen; their flocks would like them none the worse for it, and it would do both them and us laymen equal good.

May 20th.—I wonder if the day will ever come when people will recognise that the most commonplace picture or piece of pottery, the dullest book, or the ugliest bit of furniture, may, and probably will, in course of time become valuable if only from its age, and that, therefore, if we cannot regard it with affection we should none the less treat it with respect. This fact has been

specially brought home to me of late, for only last week Belinda turned out the cupboard in the lumber-room, which has not been disturbed for many a long year. From this she unearthed among other things a beautifully illustrated early edition of Walton and Cotton's "Compleat Angler," and a number of Gillray's coloured political caricatures of the beginning of the last century. Alas! that I should have to add that the plates in the book were daubed over with paint, and the prints shamefully cut and defaced: the handiwork of some spoilt child of a former generation. The book is hopelessly ruined, but I submitted the prints to a dealer at X., who tells me that had they been left intact, their value would have been double as many pounds as they are now worth shillings. I confess that I see neither beauty nor humour in Gillray's drawings, and, except as curiosities, do not much regret them, but had they been the most exquisite Bartolozzis they would probably have shared the same fate.

I happened to mention this at lunch yesterday, when A., who was present, quite put my humble experience in the shade by relating the most appalling instance of vandalism that has ever come under my notice. When he succeeded to his uncle's Irish property last year, he inherited, *inter alia*, two beautiful three-quarter length portraits, most unmistakably by Romney, but unsigned. Thinking that the artist's signature was perhaps concealed by the very deep and equally hideous frames in which they were enclosed, A. took the pictures out of them, only to find that the portraits had originally been

full-length ones, but had been truncated to their present size by some palpably unskilful hand. Full of wrath A. hastily summoned his late uncle's old butler, and asked him if he knew how this had come to be done? "Is ut the pickshurs?" replied Dennis unconcernedly. "Shure they wanst wanted new frames, and the masther had thim iligant goold ones standin' impty, so he just tuk the shears, and cut the porthraits down to fit them!"

May 24th.—Taking one of those leisurely constitutionals which form the country man's chief relaxation on a Sunday afternoon, I chanced to-day most unexpectedly on a litter of fox-cubs. I was strolling quietly across a flat grass field, when a fox-cub suddenly emerged, as it seemed to me, from the very bowels of the earth and sat down with its back to me. It was scarcely eighty yards away, and by taking advantage of two or three large trees to cover my approach I managed to get quite close to it, when I found it had come out of the mouth of one of those vault-like stone drains, over the construction of which our grandfathers used to expend much time and money, under the fond delusion they were benefiting their estates.

I kept perfectly still behind my friendly tree, and soon another sharp little head peeped out of the culvert, and then another, and another, until at last the whole family emerged and joined their big brother. They were quite unsuspecting of my vicinity, but sat round the mouth of the drain with their backs to me, and

their noses pointed in the direction from which they evidently expected their mother to return with their evening meal. I am afraid she must have had "bad hunting," and have kept them waiting too long without food, for they indulged in none of the usual frolics of their age, but sat peevish and hungry, occasionally snarling a little at one another.

What struck me most about them was the extraordinary discrepancy in their size, which was so marked that it seemed hard to believe they all belonged to the same litter. The first one I had seen was nearly twice as big as any of the others, and the remaining three all differed in proportion. I believe this is nearly always the case with fox-cubs, but I have never seen so pronounced an instance of it before.

I stood watching for them nearly ten minutes, in the hope of seeing what the old vixen would bring home for supper, but at last, getting tired of waiting, I gave a low whistle. Its effect was instantaneous: not one of the little beasties stopped to investigate the terrifying sound, but all whipped simultaneously back into the drain with the most astonishing celerity. After a pause I stepped out into the open and remained motionless; presently a little sharp nose and two bright eyes peered cautiously out, and, after taking momentary stock of the intruder, withdrew into the recesses of their home. I fear the cubs must have given a most uncomplimentary description of me to their mother, for the very same night she shifted them to a main-earth nearly two miles away.

May 25th.—To dine and sleep at K. Barracks, where Jack's regiment is quartered—a most enjoyable visit. In the days of my youth I had great leanings towards a military career; indeed, it was only the short-sighted policy of the Civil Service examiners that prevented my becoming a Field-Marshal; and to this day I cannot hear a drum-and-fife band playing such a tune as “The British Grenadiers,” without every nerve in my body tingling with unreasoning excitement. I think, however, that what delights me most whenever I am thrown among soldiers is their perfect discipline and obedience. Was it not Thackeray who said he always looked on a soldier with respect, as a man who “would draw his sword, and cut off my head” if ordered to do so. I have exactly the same feeling regarding Thomas Atkins, especially in view of the often unpromising material out of which he is evolved.

But two years ago, I swore in, as a recruit for the Coldstream Guards, young 'Arry Brown, the most unpleasant character among the young men in the village. Not that he was entirely bad, but he was an idle, loafing, fellow without mind or manners, who would never do a day's work, and who was fairly launched on the broad path that leads to Quarter Sessions. I can see him now, round-shouldered and scowling, unwashed and unshorn, stumbling hoarse-voiced through the oath of allegiance, a striking contrast to the dapper recruiting-sergeant who brought him to me. Eighteen months passed away, and behold 'Arry home on furlough, trim and smart in his white jacket, upright as a dart,

civil and respectful in speech, and looking all men straight in the face. Moreover, what his mother proudly described as "quite a scholar!"

I wonder what his fate would have been if he had not taken the shilling!

A great deal is both said and written nowadays about the shameful expense forced on young officers in the Army; and a year or two ago Mr. Wyndham, speaking in the House of Commons—I quote from memory—said it was little short of a scandal, that a young man entering the service should require a private income of £150 over and above his pay. At first sight this may seem to be the case, but I should like to know in what other profession a youth can start in life with sufficient emolument to render him independent of private means, or an allowance from his parents? Is this the case in the Church, the Law, Land Agency, or at the Bar? Are the salaries paid to junior clerks in the City, or in Government offices, such as they can live on? It is true that a subaltern's pay is absorbed by his regimental expenses, but in what other walk of life can a gentleman be lodged, fed, and served, at so small an expense? The £100 or £150 a year which the young officer receives from his father is no more than the pocket-money which the average youth of public-school education is brought up to expect. It will be a bad day for the British Army if it ever, in these matters, be modelled on Continental lines, where, certainly in the infantry, not one officer in fifty is either a gentleman by birth nor in the position of one by

fortune, and the first person to resent the change would be Tommy Atkins himself.

May 27th.—For the first time in my life I have to-day seen a water-diviner, or, as the country-folk term them, a “dowser” at work. There has been a lack of water on parts of my friend A.’s estate, and it was with a view to rectifying this unfortunate state of affairs that he had recourse to the diviner’s art. I accepted A.’s invitation to be present on this occasion with much anticipation, for, despite manifold and unimpeachable evidence to the contrary, I have always been a little sceptical as to any individual’s power to locate subterranean springs by means of a hazel-twigs. Still, I recognised that this feeling was more or less the outcome of ignorance, and I therefore approached to-day’s proceedings with a perfectly open mind. Arrived at A.’s, I found a large assemblage of friends and neighbours, and a move was at once made to the first place where it was desirable to find water—a farmhouse on the top of a low hill. On the way thither, the dowser, a stout party of considerable “blandishment,” as they say in the north of England, cut himself a couple of forked hazel-twigs out of an adjacent plantation, and then, turning up his coat-sleeves, proceeded to walk slowly round the farm-buildings, crouched double, and holding his twig by the extremities of the two forks, with its end pointing to the ground. Very soon it turned completely round on its forks, without the slightest apparent assistance from the dowser, who an-

nounced the existence of water at an estimated depth of about sixty feet. It was certainly curious—nay, almost uncanny—to see the way in which the twig reversed itself. I am confident the diviner exercised no pressure on it; he repeated the operation several times for our inspection, and even allowed me to hold his wrists while he did so; had he tried to influence the twig by muscular force I could not have failed to detect it.

Many of the spectators then insisted on experimenting with the twig, but in no instance did it exhibit the slightest attempt at motion.

A move was next made to another farm about half a mile away, and here the dowser had hardly set to work ere his rod was seized with the most violent agitation; it seemed as though it would almost escape from his fingers; and he joyfully proclaimed the presence of a bountiful spring of water about fifteen feet underground. A third essay was then made at another place: a cottage on the crest of a bleak hill, but here the diviner had to confess himself defeated; his twig scarcely stirred, and though he admitted the hill *might* contain water, it was evidently at such a depth as would render it impossible to be worked.

We then adjourned for lunch, after which I had some conversation with the diviner, a well-spoken man, who had been a baker until his miraculous powers unexpectedly revealed themselves to him; since when, to use his own expression, he "ad never looked behind 'im." He told me his services were booked weeks in advance, and that he had even received an offer to go to—I

think—Algeria, to find water for a mining company. He further gave me a pamphlet containing a number of most flattering testimonials from grateful clients of all classes, varying from peers of the realm downwards; and I have returned home after a thoroughly interesting experience, greatly impressed by what I have seen. I shall watch the result of A.'s experiment with much curiosity.¹

¹ I may as well state the result of this for the benefit of those interested in the art of the divining-rod. Fired by the dowser's assurances, my friend set to work with the enthusiasm of his race to sink a well at the farm, where water was expected at a depth of fifteen feet. After digging through fifty feet of the most tenacious clay, he finally reached a bed of rock known by local geologists to be twenty feet thick, when he reluctantly abandoned the work, leaving a beautiful deep hole and a large mound of excavated soil as proofs of his energy for future generations. He then turned his attention to the spot where water was supposed to exist at a depth of sixty feet, but, with a caution born of experience, decided this time to bore before commencing to dig, with the result that after boring to more than double the indicated depth, he once more struck rock. This effectually resisted all efforts to pierce it, and A. has now retired in disgust to Connemara, a locality where, I am assured, the precious fluid he has been seeking exists in admirable abundance.

But it is a true saying, that there is no cloud without a silver lining. The tenant of the cottage where the dowser failed to locate water is an obstinate individual, who has always maintained his belief in its existence in his back garden. He therefore borrowed the apparatus for which A. had no further use, and did a little amateur boring on his own account, with the astonishing result that he struck a spring at about thirteen feet, which, a well being subsequently sunk, has supplied him with an unfailing supply of excellent water ever since.

In view of the conflicting opinions respecting the efficacy of the divining-rod, I do not venture to intrude my own conclusions. I merely give the above facts as they came under my personal notice. Ample testimony exists that not only the man whom A. employed, but others of his craft do achieve the most astonishing results. It is not given to mortals to command unvarying success, and I suppose that on the only occasion that I have seen a "dowser" at work, it did not happen to be his "day out."

J U N E

June 6th.—To watch the cricket match between our village and the team from X., an annual event of considerable local importance. Time was when I used to play for our side, but nowadays they make the ball so ridiculously small and the wickets so absurdly large, that there seems no demand for my services. I suppose that every one becomes *laudator temporis acti se puer* as he grows too old, or too lazy, to indulge in the sports of his youth; but, truth to tell, country cricket has so altered in character of late years as to no longer have much charm for me. Purely *village* cricket is fast becoming a thing of the past, and except in those favoured hamlets where the parson, or the squire, or his agent, keeps up the now flagging interest in the game, it has ceased to be the universal pastime of the country. Nowadays the gilded youth of the labouring class spends its spare cash and leisure time in careering about the roads on cheap bicycles: “a nuisance to their betthers, a laughin'-shtock to their equils, an’ a curse to thimsilves.”

One of the chief factors in the decay of village cricket is the modern craving for display and luxury, which is sapping the lower as steadily as the higher classes. Formerly, any fairly level piece of turf was

considered good enough for a pitch, a wooden bench and table for the scorers constituted the pavilion, and the nearest hedgerow was the dressing-room. Not that there was much necessity for this; except perhaps the parson, or such public-school or university lads as lived in the neighbourhood, no one appeared in flannels; and when Bill or Tummas took the field, he merely doffed his coat and waistcoat, turned up the bottoms of his trousers, pulled his leather waist-strap a hole tighter, and was equipped for the fray.

Now, however, it seems impossible for any self-respecting village club to exist without a carefully laid and rolled field, for admission to which a charge is made; a wooden shanty, dignified by the name of pavilion, is run up, whereby the club is usually landed in a slough of debt, from which it has to be rescued by the donations of the charitable; and the young men deem it incumbent on them to wear slop-made blazers and flannels. But in my humble opinion nothing tends so much to harm village cricket as the so-called "cup competitions" which have sprung up of late years. Some misguided philanthropist, or more generally an aspirant for Parliamentary honours, is induced to offer a cup to be played for by clubs in a particular district, and forthwith an entire change comes over the cricket of the locality. The old friendly matches between the villages and small towns degenerate into "contests," invariably, in my experience, conducted on the "win, tie, or wrangle" principle: the small village clubs soon find themselves outclassed, and abandon

cricket in disgust; until at last the game becomes confined to the more opulent towns of the district which have larger grounds to practise on, and perhaps a third-rate professional to coach them. Such a state of affairs may occasionally lead to "spotting" a promising colt for the county eleven, but I do not believe it to be the best means of popularising cricket among the present generation, who are, alas! only too prone to run after the strange gods of bicycling, and (in the upper class) of golf.

To-day we won by nearly forty runs, a gratifying result, due, as is generally the case when he is able to play, to the hitting of Bill Smith, our local saddler. Bill is one of those fortunate individuals gifted by nature not only with extraordinary sympathy of hand and eye, but also with abnormal strength wherewith to utilise it to the best advantage. Unfortunately, the exigencies of business, a large and yearly increasing family, and a shrewish wife who looks but sourly on cricket as opposed to saddlery, all too frequently prevent its display. Although Bill has a very fair notion of defence, defiance is his strong point, and once "set," his swiping rivals that of "Bun" Thornton himself. Good ball, bad ball, straight ball, wide, yorker, or long-hop, he treats them all with equal contempt, and sends them flying over long-on's head as fast as they are sent down to him. Still there are times when even Homier nods, and not so very long ago he was twice bowled, "first ball," by a very small Eton boy, an occasion still referred to with bated breath in local cricket circles;

and I do not remember to have ever seen anything finer than the dignified and incredulous air with which he surveyed first his broken wicket, next his bat, then the pitch, and finally the diminutive David who had brought about Goliath's downfall.

As is but too often the case in rustic matches, the usual bickering over an umpire's decision occurred this afternoon; an event as lamentable as it is frequent, and, needless to add, futile. How futile was beautifully demonstrated to me a great many years ago, when I was a lad at a private tutor's in Yorkshire. Our village was playing a team of miners from the West Riding, who were determined to win, by fair means if possible, but by foul ones if necessary, and finding themselves outclassed, they soon adopted the latter course. Their captain, a fiery-faced, bandy-legged, little man, presently resorted to the simple and ingenious device of placing his crooked limbs together and standing in front of his wicket whenever he saw a straight ball coming. After this had happened once or twice, the bowler naturally appealed, and the umpire, a burly, phlegmatic inn-keeper, very properly gave the man "out." The scene which followed was inimitable, and I shall never forget it. Advancing half-way down the pitch, and glaring at the umpire as though he would eat him, the batsman shrieked: "Doos thoo me-a-n to sa-a-y ar'm oot?" "Aye, ar doos," replied the unmoved Boniface. "Weel, then, *ar* says thet thoo's nabbut a —— leear!" retorted the Geordie, absolutely stamping with rage. "Mebbe, mar lad, mebbe," replied the umpire coolly, striking

a match on the seat of his trousers—a gest at once indicative of unconcern and contempt—“but thoo’s gat to gan for arl that!”

June 7th.—Coming through the village this afternoon I met old James, and stopped to ask after his wife who has long been ailing. On the strength, I suppose, of having once been a butler, James delights in long words and high-sounding phrases, an idiosyncrasy which occasionally leads him to employ some very infelicitous metaphors. Thus, when his cow presented him with twins, he ungratefully described her as “profligate”; and when Belinda tumbled off her bicycle, he presumed she had lost her “equilibrium.” To-day, in answer to my inquiry after Mrs. James’ health, he replied with dignity: “Thank you, sir, she ebbs and flows. I never knew a woman who ebbed and *flew* so much in all my life.”

June 13th.—We have been spending a few days at a friend’s house in Berkshire, where I have devoted most of my time to endeavouring to outwit the trout of the chalk stream that intersects my host’s estate. In this, however, I admit that my success has not been commensurate with my efforts, for dry-fly fishing is an art to which I have never served an apprenticeship; and but that the “bungler’s friend,” the May-fly, was up my bag would indeed have been a light one. True, I killed a few fish, and one afternoon got three that weighed over five pounds, but for each trout I caught,

a real proficient in chalk-stream fishing would probably have landed half-a-dozen. No doubt I am unconsciously trying to persuade myself that the grapes were sour, but despite the modern craze for dry-fly fishing, I cannot wax very enthusiastic about it. It is a charming and ultra-scientific form of sport, but it seems to me to hold the same ratio to trout-fishing in wilder streams that covert-shooting does to deer-stalking. The flat green water-meadows with the gentle chalk downs rising from them; the old red-brick mills; the osier-beds and pollard-willows, and the placid crystal-clear stream, all combine to make a restful and typically English landscape, but which lacks the sense of wildness, without which as an accessory I do not think any field sport can be held to be perfect. I have lately come across a passage in one of Sir Samuel Baker's works, which appears to me to so aptly express this feeling that I cannot refrain from quoting it.

"To all true sportsmen the enjoyment of the sport measures in proportion to the wildness of the country. Catch a six-pound trout in a quiet mill-pond in a populous neighbourhood, with well-cultivated meadows on either side of the stream, fat cattle grazing on the rich pasturage, and perhaps actually watching you as you land your fish: it *may* be sport. But catch a similar fish far from the haunts of men, in a boiling rocky torrent surrounded by heathery hills, where the shadow of a rod has seldom been reflected in the stream, and you cease to think the former fish worth catching: still, he is the same size, showed the same courage, had the same perfection of condition, and yet you cannot allow



A CHALK STREAM.

that it was sport compared with this wild stream. If you see no difference in the excitement, you are no sportsman: you would as soon catch him in a washing-tub; or you should buy your fish when you require him, but never use a rod, or you would disgrace the hickory."

Without going quite so far as the last paragraph suggests, there can be no doubt that the question of surroundings of wild or romantic scenery largely influences all men who possess the real love of sport, which, needless, I hope, to remark, does not mean the mere killing of wild animals.

I am afraid, however, that the uncompromising dry-fly scientist would hold that I had "disgraced the hickory"—nowadays I suppose one should say the split-cane—when I reveal the piscatorial outrage of which I was guilty only yesterday. Such an offence has surely never before been perpetrated on my host's most orthodoxy-fished stream, nor, I trust, will ever be again; and in mitigation thereof I can only plead that it was the woman who tempted me. Just as I was starting for the river, after five o'clock tea, the *châtelaine* of the house comes to me in dire distress, saying how the rogue of a fishmonger had played her false, that there was company to dinner and no fish to set before it, and that she looked to me to make good the deficiency "by fair means or foul."

There is many a true word spoken in jest: on the honour of a gentleman I steadfastly, if fruitlessly, adhered to the former alternative until scarce half-an-hour remained before the dressing-bell would ring, and

then, opportunity presenting itself to my hand, I fell from my high estate. For coming to a foaming, spouting, weir, where surrounding osier-beds screened me from possible witnesses of my backslicing, I substituted a trace for my cast, and a shining phantom minnow for my fly, and cast it forth into the troubled waters of the weir-pool. The result was marvellous, and surpassed my wildest anticipations. It was evident that the respectable denizens of the stream had never seen such a thing as an artificial minnow before, for they displayed the most unsophisticated interest in it, and in less than ten minutes I had landed two, which weighed over five pounds between them, and which appeared on the dinner-table within an hour of leaving their native element. Firm, flaky, and pink as any grilse, they earned the well-merited approval of all who partook of them; but I admit that it was not without inward contrition that *I* received the encomiums of my fellow-guests, who took it for granted the fish were a tribute to my skill with the artificial fly. Nor does it redound to the credit of my poor human nature that I was at no pains to dispel this pleasing delusion, though I privately made a clean breast to my host before retiring to bed.

June 17th.—From Berkshire we have come on to London, an event we did not contemplate when leaving home, as Belinda's Aunt Harriet has placed her flat at our disposal, a sudden attack of gout having obliged the old lady to seek the healing waters of Buxton.

This change in our plans, while not altogether displeasing to myself, is peculiarly agreeable to Belinda, whose soul hankers after London in the season as earnestly as sailors desire the sea, or hillmen the hills. As usual one is assured on all sides, but especially by one's tradesmen, that it is a dull season; but the streets appear to me to be as crowded as they always are in June; there was the usual block of carriages in Piccadilly and Bond Street, and wishing to dine one evening at a restaurant much in vogue, we were informed that every table had been engaged by mid-day.

Of all the many changes that have come over London society in my recollection, nothing is more striking to the occasional visitor to the metropolis, such as I have become, than the present passion for *rus in urbe*. Formerly, when people came to London for the season, they repudiated the country for the time being, and appeared only anxious to sever all connection with it. But now their chief aim seems to be to shake the dust of London from off their feet on every possible opportunity, as though no self-respecting person could possibly spend seven days there without change. "Week-end" country-house parties, bicycling parties, motor parties, golf, racing; in fine, any and every form of out-door amusement has become the fashion of the London season, and I am bound to confess that of all Society's many crazes that I can remember this seems to me the most praiseworthy. But with it has arisen a carelessness of dress rather grievous to my old-fashioned notions. When I was a lad, no self-respecting young man would have

dared to walk about London in a Panama hat, a suit of flannels, and brown shoes as they do nowadays; and strolling into the Park one morning to smoke my cigar at the now fashionable hour of 10 A.M., I noticed that the same *negligé* style of costume was affected for riding.

I wonder what sum would have tempted a dandy in the days of my youth to ride in the Park on a hog-maned, dock-tailed, 14·2 pony, dressed in a tweed shooting-coat, no waistcoat, and polo breeches and boots? I do not think he would have been fortunate enough, like the youth I noticed this morning, to find a beautiful young lady to ride and talk with; but here again a quarter of a century ago, the said young lady's mamma would not have appeared in the Row in a brown holland coat, a linen shirt, a straw-hat with a Zingari ribbon round it, and a short hunting-skirt. Another thing which invariably astonishes my bucolic mind whenever I visit London is the extraordinary way in which the present generation of coachmen sit on their boxes and drive, until I am forced to the conclusion that the craze for rusticity has led to the importation of that anomalous being, the groom-gardener, a type of domestic usually confined to country parsonages. No doubt, thanks to the spread of wealth, many people now keep carriages and horses who would not have done so in former years, and who, not having been educated up to the little niceties of stable deportment, know little, and care less, about such matters; but to see a coachman, as I have seen many a one within the last two or three days, with his body bent forward and his legs doubled under him like a clerk at a high

desk, his elbows up to his ears, both hands grasping the reins, and to crown all his whip stuck in its bucket with a long lash of red whipcord streaming on the breeze, is not conducive to respect for the owner of the equipage he is driving. Of the latter it may truly be said :

“O wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oorsels as ithers see us.”

June 18th.—It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good : turning into the club on my way home from the theatre last night, I found George in grim despair at being suddenly recalled by telegram to his regiment in Ireland. Having, consequently, no further use for his stall at Ascot, he bestowed it on me, and so I have been down to-day to see the race for the Cup, and enjoyed myself in sober, middle-aged fashion. Like a great many other apparently unpalatable things, advancing years are not without their compensation to the philosophically-minded, a fact which was brought home to me to-day. For, seated quietly in my stall, with easy neck-cloth and comfortable shoes, drinking in the beauty of the view over heath and forest, and caring little which horse won, I thought, not without inward complacency, of that now remote period when, high-collared and tight-booted, I should have been struggling and squeezing in the Ring in the vain attempt to over-reach keener wits than my own ; or, like some of the couples I noticed in quiet corners of the paddock this afternoon, have been sipping at that enchanted cup, of which I had yet to learn that “*plus aloes quam mellis habet.*”

None the less, like my opinions on dry-fly fishing, I am painfully conscious that these admirable middle-aged sentiments savour not a little of sour grapes.

Few things nowadays strike the infrequent race-goer like myself more than the American seat, which all our jockeys seem impartially to have adopted : it may be effective, it is certainly not elegant. Looking at one of the Trans-Atlantic manikins perched between his horse's ears, flicking it underhand with his whip, I could not help picturing to myself an imaginary finish between him and that giant of my youth, Archer, when the latter was at the zenith of his fame. Of all the race riders, professional or amateur, that I have ever seen, not one has left the impression on my mind that Archer did, of ability to endow the horse he rode with his own nervous energy. Almost my earliest recollection of racing is being taken to see the Derby, and of seeing Archer, then just blossoming into fame, win a race by a short head. I have forgotten the name of the horse he was riding, or of the race itself—it was not the Derby. I can only recall that he wore a white, or pale yellow, jacket, but I seem to see him now, as it were actually lifting his horse by his own intrinsic resolution first past the post in the very last stride.

June 22nd.—To the first exhibition of the Royal Agricultural Society in its permanent show-yard : a venture that, I fear, will prove neither popular nor successful. It is some years since I have been to a “Royal” show, but no matter in what part of England I have assisted at it, it

always appears to present exactly the same features : the same Brobdingnagian cart-horses, and over-fed cattle ; the same lethargic pigs and panting sheep. These latter, especially the curious mountain breeds, are always a source of interest to me. There was one enormous shaggy brute called a Lonk, only found, I believe, in north-west Yorkshire, which quite fascinated me this afternoon. I should not suppose, from its appearance, that the Lonk furnishes the most succulent form of mutton for the table, but I can imagine that in its native wilds it might easily be converted into a most excellent beast of chase, and afford admirable sport for the rifle. If it were only found in Siberia, or the Himalayas, instead of on the Yorkshire fells, I am positive that *Ovis Lonki* heads would become one of the most cherished of big-game trophies.

Close by were some interesting little sheep from Cumberland, the Herdwicks, the original stock of which, tradition goes, came from one of the ships of the Spanish Armada that was cast away in the Solway Firth. I wonder if the story be true, or if there are any sheep like them in Spain at the present day ? But I cannot help thinking that by the time an unwieldy galleon had blundered from Cadiz, round England and Scotland to the Cumbrian coast, there would not have been many live sheep on board.

That poverty brings strange bedfellows has long been an axiom, but it has been left for agriculture to supply the most extraordinary combination of sleeping partners that has ever come under my notice. Chancing to meet my old friend R., a Scotchman, much devoted to farming,

and learning that he was exhibiting a Galloway bull, I accompanied him to view the animal, which we found in charge of his head cattleman, a grey-headed old gentleman from Ayrshire. Having duly admired the bull, I asked its attendant if he was enjoying his visit to England. He answered that he liked the show “weel aneuch,” but that he “could nae thole”—put up with—the sleeping accommodation provided for him, of which he absolutely declined to make use.

“But you must sleep somewhere,” said his master; “where did you sleep last night?”

“Wi’ the bull!” replied the man, in the most matter-of-fact tone. (This is an absolute fact.)

Going later in the afternoon to get a cup of tea at a refreshment tent, I was much amused by an argument that was going on at the next table to mine, concerning the conduct of the late war, a topic I hoped was happily buried outside the House of Commons. One of the two disputants, arrayed in a shining broadcloth frock-coat, looked like a linen-draper, and was a pro-Boer; while the other, an ardent Imperialist, was a most unmistakable Yorkshire, or Lincolnshire, grazier. Both parties waxed warm over their respective views, flatly contradicting each other’s statements, until at last the draper metaphorically spread his frock-coat tails before the agriculturist, by saying that he thought Lord Roberts a “very poor general.” To my surprise the man of beeves professed to agree with him, but it was merely a case of “*reculer pour mieux sauter.*” “Yow’re raight,” he exclaimed with feigned approval, “ar thenk he’s

nabbut a varry power general marsef, and"—with a triumphant change of tone—"ar'll tell yow why. When he got that theer Crongey by the lug, he shouldn't have given him now qua-a-rter. He should ha' shot him, an' arl his men as well, ivery yan o' them, an' towght 'em to *maind their own business i' future*," and with this he flung out of the tent, leaving, as far as I could judge, the disgusted linen-draper to pay the score for their mutual refreshment.

June 24th.—To Ranelagh with Belinda to see a polo match. I was much impressed by the ultra-science of the fast, galloping game of the present day, and inwardly contrasted it with the first exhibition of polo I ever saw. This was at Lillie Bridge, more years ago than I care to remember, when, to the best of my recollection, there were six or seven players on each side, who rode 13-hand ponies, and rarely, if ever, went out of a canter. Judged by modern standards, this must have been a very dull performance, yet I am not sure that it may not have been better fun for both players and spectators than the present style of game. Like association football—may I be forgiven the parallel—this has degenerated into a mere question of scientific combination, so much so that I am told that in first-class polo, the unhappy No. 1 of a team is not supposed to even think of trying to hit the ball, but to devote all his energies to riding off, or hampering, the No. 4 of the opposing side, a state of affairs which appears to me to lack in sport what it gains in science. Not,

however, that I am competent to offer an opinion on the subject at all, for my knowledge of the game is confined to the rôle of an occasional spectator, and to envying the nerve, skill, and, I may add, the purse, of those who play it. From every point of view it is a grand, hard pastime, which I should think ranks only second to pig-sticking as a test of combined coolness and horsemanship.

In one respect, however, I am by no means sure that polo has proved an unmixed blessing to the community at large, and that is in the alteration it tends to produce in our breeds of ponies. Since the raising of the Hurlingham standard, there has been an increasing inclination to produce quick, galloping ponies, which but too often are mere weeds, useless alike for polo or anything else. The inflated prices now given for polo-ponies induce many petty breeders, small farmers and tradesmen, to send their mares to some "cheap and nasty" thoroughbred stallion, in the hope of producing one of these high-priced animals. They read in the paper of a polo-pony fetching two or three hundred guineas at auction, and ignoring the fact that it has had to earn its reputation before acquiring such a value, they ask themselves why they should not breed such a one, instead of an animal which at four years old is worth perhaps a tenth of such sum? Consequently, it is yearly becoming more difficult to obtain the old-fashioned class of useful pony, which formerly was bred all over England and Wales, but especially in such localities as Dartmoor, the New Forest, and the North-country dales.

Standing on short legs, with admirable bone, they none the less had a good deal of "breeding" in their appearance, and I fancy most of us can remember at least one of them, "the famous grey pony" of our youth, whose duties ranged from teaching the young idea to ride, to dragging its mamma about in a basket-chaise,—there were no Ralli cars in those days—which worked for twenty years, and was never sick nor sorry the whole time.

June 27th.—Although we only came home the day before yesterday, Belinda's appetite for amusement is so little blunted by her recent dissipations in London that she insisted on my driving her to a crôquet-party this afternoon. The revival of crôquet, a game for which I had always rather a sneaking affection, is positively astounding. Twenty years ago it seemed as though lawn-tennis had killed it for ever; its name was never mentioned; I almost doubt whether such a thing as a mallet were procurable in London, even at the "Stores," and if it were, I am sure it was never asked for. Now it has sprung to life again, and, as far as one can see, has completely turned the tables on its quondam rival. This, I attribute to two causes: first, the influence of lovely woman who has realised that it affords more opportunity, not perhaps for display of her charms, but for that quieter and more dangerous intercourse between the two sexes denied by the more violent game; and secondly, to the abnormal pitch of scientific excel-

lence to which lawn-tennis had become elevated. The smashing style of service introduced some years ago in conjunction with volleying at the net, effective and necessary as it may have been for tournament service, was not conducive to quiet enjoyment of what was after all a mere country-house pastime; the majority of players had neither time nor opportunity to acquire the standard of excellence demanded by the new methods; the younger generation became bitten by the craze for golf, until finally lawn-tennis has been abandoned to the comparatively small body of enthusiasts, who travel from tournament to tournament in pursuit of fame—and prizes. It is a great pity, for it is an admirable game.

Nor are signs wanting that crôquet is doomed to the same fate. This, as I remember it in my boyhood, was a free-and-easy sort of amusement played on large grounds with wide hoops. I can see now the large quartered hoop with a bell dangling from it, that used to stand in the middle of the ground; while, to the best of my recollection, though in this I am probably wrong, there was no tiresome boundary to interfere with a free and dashing style of play. Indeed, one's chief pleasure was to "tight crôquet" an adversary, placing your foot on your own ball, and sending his away into the farthest clump of rhododendrons or bed of geraniums. Now all this is abolished: the ground is restricted and cramped by a boundary which baulks all one's finest display of muscle; the hoops are high, narrow things through

which a rat could scarce pass with comfort, and the whole game conducted on rigidly scientific principles. Perhaps I write a little feelingly, and indeed I did not distinguish myself this afternoon, returning home a good deal chastened in spirit by the evident contempt with which the charming young lady, who was my partner, regarded my clumsy efforts to get through those abominable tight hoops.

June 29th.—I daresay many people have heard the delightful, if slightly gruesome, anecdote of the moribund Yorkshireman, who, asking his daughter for a slice of the ham she had just removed from the copper in which it had been boiling, was refused on the grounds that “ham’s not for thou; ham’s for t’ funeral;” but this afternoon the Vicar told me a story bearing on the same subject, where the boot was on the other leg. Many years ago when a curate at S., about twenty miles from here, he went to visit an aged parishioner, a small farmer, whose end was daily expected. Finding him rather better on this occasion, and propped up in bed, he proposed to read a chapter of the Bible to him. The sick man gratefully assented, but paid scant attention to the discourse, constantly fumbling under his pillow for some form of edible which he mumbled with evident satisfaction between his toothless gums. At last the Vicar stopped reading, and asked him what he was doing? The old gentleman smiled slyly: “Why,” he said, in a triumphant whisper, “they baht some

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sponge-biscuits agean moy vuneral, an' hid 'em in the coopboard, but they don't know as 'ow I vound 'em, and"—with a senile chuckle of delight—"when I be gone, an' they coom to luke for 'em, they wun't vaint none on 'em left!"

JULY

July 2nd.—Now is the time of year when, as his garden yields up its fruits in due season, the countryman who sits down to his simple meals is able to think with scornful pity of his less fortunate brethren, who, whether from choice or necessity, are at present denizens of the great metropolis. I admit this sentiment to be at once egotistical and unchristian, but I cannot help sharing it, when I conclude my breakfast with strawberries that, but an hour before, clung blushing to their parent plant; again, when at luncheon I augment my portion of modest cold lamb with a salad of lettuces, still distilling the milky tears wrung from them by the cruel knife that so recently shore them from their stem; and above all at dinner when I

“ Render grateful thanks that He
Who made the duck, ordained the pea,”

and savour the tender little spheres that have only been plucked and shelled since the glowing orb of day inclined itself towards the west. It is then with a feeling of exquisite selfishness that one recalls the tasteless and travel-worn apologies for these simple delicacies that even the most wealthy Londoner has to endure, and gratefully recognises the fact that the wind is occasionally tempered to the bucolic lamb.

'There are two articles of food that, in my experience, are absolutely unobtainable in London ; the one a new-laid egg, and the other fresh, young, green peas.

July 3rd.—Despite the fact that I number some very charming Americans among my friends, until to-day I have never been a very ardent admirer of their country and its institutions ; nor a believer in that blood-tie which, according to Mr. Chamberlain, is to bring about the millennium by an alliance of the Anglo-Saxon races of the world. This would, doubtless, be an arrangement as simple as admirable were the United States peopled by Anglo-Saxons only, but as the major portion of their population consists of individuals garnered from every race under the sun, who, in many instances, have left their country for their country's good, I have always been a little sceptical as to the bond of consanguinity as far as England is concerned. But since this morning my feelings towards America have undergone considerable modification, not to say transformation ; henceforth, every citizen of that great Republic shall be to me as a man and a brother ; its yellow Press shall twist the British lion's tail without extracting a murmur from that infinitesimal portion of the noble animal's anatomy represented by my unworthy self ; and I almost feel as if I could uncomplainingly consent to a further reduction of the value of the shares I hold in a Trans-Atlantic railroad.

The reason for so sudden a change is this. I had arranged to lunch with the C.'s, and, the day being fine,

determined to go on my bicycle. It is exactly seven miles from my doorstep to theirs along the most lonely and unfrequented road in the country; and I had barely reached the fourth milestone when a jarring sensation about the region of the spine led, first to the horrid suspicion, and then to the dreadful certainty, that my back-wheel was punctured. Now, although I make frequent use of my bicycle, I am honestly ashamed to confess that I am as ignorant of its mechanism as any one can well be, and am, moreover, incapable of repairing even such a simple mishap as this appeared to be. Consequently, the choice lay before me of walking nearly four miles home to be met by Belinda's flouts and jeers, or an equal distance to C.'s, where I was certain to arrive late for lunch; but, after mature consideration, I decided on the latter course as the least painful to my feelings.

However, I had barely tramped half a mile along the hot, dusty road before I was overtaken by another bicyclist, a solitary lady, who eyed me rather queerly as she passed—I have never yet quite made up my mind as to whether a man looks a bigger fool riding a bicycle or wheeling it—and who, to my astonishment, dismounted when she had gone a few yards and waited for me to catch her up. There was something about the fair stranger's appearance, a clear, sallow skin, dark expressive eyes, and what I believe is termed a *petite* figure, that marked her as a foreigner, and I should have written her down a Frenchwoman, had not her curiously-fashioned bicycling costume, the blue veil that

protected her complexion from the attack of the envious sun, the nickel-plated courier's wallet that hung from her slender waist, and the absurdly pointed shoes with which she was shod, all sufficiently marked her nationality. Consequently I made my best bow without betraying any astonishment, when, addressing me through a most charming little nose, she inquired if she could be of any assistance?

If the newcomer's glance had been satirical before, it was doubly so when I explained the state of the case; it was evident to her practical mind that the man who goes a-bicycling without the requisite knowledge to repair a punctured tyre is little better than a fool—wherein I most heartily agree with her—but all she said, as she propped her own bicycle against a telegraph post, was "Waal, ef you cayn't mend your machine, I guess I'll hev to fix it for you," and without further parley she promptly proceeded to do so. Mysterious implements, and tubes of evil-smelling, gluey substances were produced from her tool-bag; in a trice my bicycle was turned upside down; the puncture was speedily found, or, as she termed it, "lo-cayted," and rejecting my shamefaced efforts to assist her, in less than ten minutes this *dea ex machinâ* had put matters to rights, my wheel was pumped tight again, and we had resumed our journey. The only comment on my incapacity that my new friend permitted herself was, that if I "started to ride a bicycle on American roads I should do considerable walking."

The fair Yankee proved a most charming and com-

municative companion: she was, it appeared, a professor or teacher at a great American scholastic establishment for women, who had been saving up her money for years with a view to a trip to Europe. She had come over with a party of friends she intended to rejoin at Stratford-on-Avon, having temporarily parted from them in order to pay a visit to a relative settled in our part of England. To travel about a strange country alone seemed to her a perfectly simple proceeding, and, indeed, she appeared to be a young person of remarkable independence of character. Her father—“Popper” as she styled him—dealt in dry goods somewhere in Massachusetts, but she had apparently been emancipated from parental control for years, (I suppose she was about twenty-three) and “guessed it was best for girls to fend for themselves, and not sit on the stoop till some feller came bumming along to marry them.” I parted from her with a regret that I trust was mutual, and with an interchange of cards—fancy an English school-teacher with a visiting-card!—while I fully intend that when “Sadie B. Magruder,” of the “Silas P. Frisk Institute of Pennsylvania,” resumes her professional duties “in the fall,” she shall find a memento awaiting her of the hot and angry Englishman she befriended to-day.

July 5th.—I have been spending my Sabbath afternoon on the Common, watching a couple of “drumming” snipe. The manner in which the snipe manages to produce this curious noise has long been a fertile source of controversy to ornithologists, a title to which I can lay

no claim, and I am, therefore, chary of hazarding my own humble opinion on the question ; yet it seems to me undoubtedly caused by an intensely rapid vibration of the bird's pinions. No one who has ever watched a snipe "drumming" can have failed to notice how much larger it appears than in ordinary circumstances ; it looks as big as a woodcock, and it seems to me to expand its wing-feathers to the utmost, and cause them to vibrate and hum with the resistance of the atmosphere as it darts through it. Plovers have much the same peculiarity, only to a lesser degree.

But to me the most charming part of the performance lies in the exquisite curves of the drumming snipe's flight : as it flings itself downward with evident enjoyment across the sky, it looks as though it were cutting vast aerial "outside edges" on a pair of invisible skates. I lay smoking my pipe for an hour on the short turf of the "sheep-trimmed down" this afternoon, and never wearied of watching the birds swoop and curve and wheel across the pleasant summer sky. Nor did the snipe seem to find it an exhausting amusement : they never ceased the whole time, and I "left them drumming" : however this may be produced it is certainly not by any great muscular exertion.

July 8th.—Tom slept here last night to say good-bye before starting—*O terque beatus!*—for his annual trip to Norway, and told us a good story about himself. Last year, on his way down to Bergen from his river, he found himself stranded in a hotel in one of the tourist-haunted

parts of Scandinavia, the proprietor of which sought to attract the wandering Briton to his hostelry by advertising "unrivalled" ryper-shooting. Having nothing to do, Tom unstrapped his gun-case, borrowed a dog from his host, and ranged the neighbouring mountains from morn till dewy eve, with the result that he saw, and bagged, one bird. Just as he was leaving on the following morning the fallacious innkeeper approached with the visitors' book, and asked him to write a testimonial. "With pleasure," replied the ready Tom, and seizing the pen he wrote, "One Ryper does not make a Harvest!"

This anecdote recalled to me a personal experience of Norwegian travel. A few years ago I was going from Bergen to Throndhjem by coasting steamer, and fell into conversation with a fellow-passenger, the only other Englishman on board. He was a city clerk, a Cockney of the Cockneys, who had never been out of England before, was intensely bored with Norway, and, but that he had been ordered a sea-trip by his doctor, would have gone home before. I asked him how far north he intended to travel. "I've forgotten the name of the plaice," he replied wearily, "but it's something like 'Ammersmith.'" It was some time before I realised that the worthy Londoner's destination was Hammerfest!

July 9th.—Haymaking is in full swing, and from morn to night the whole country-side rings with the whirring of grass-cutters—a poor exchange for the pleasant tinkling of the mowers' scythe, which some of us may still remember. But the constant rain to which we are now

subjected is quite nullifying the advantage of an excellent crop of grass: it is sad to see the hay standing in rows of soddened cocks, or, worse still, lying in long wet swathes about the fields. Still, farmers in this neighbourhood—and I expect everywhere else—will only have themselves to thank for much of their losses this hay-harvest. Had they begun haymaking ten days ago, when the grass was already seeding, and the weather had not broken, they would have got three-fourths of their crop carried in good condition. The idea of cutting his grass as long as he thinks it will grow another half-inch in length is most repugnant to the average British farmer, who prefers to gain in bulk and lose in quality; a deplorable state of things.

As usual in a wet summer, some gentleman, whose zeal is not commensurate with his knowledge of his subject, has written to the papers to advise farmers to dry their hay on wooden frames, as is done in Norway and Switzerland. This is no doubt an excellent expedient on the little patches of Alpine meadow of mountainous countries, but one impossible of application on a large English farm.

But despite the badness of the weather, farmers complain less of it than of the difficulty of obtaining labour. So marked is the dislike to farm-work among the rural labouring classes, that I am at last beginning to think that we *are* a nation of shopkeepers, and that we do not possess that ingrained love of the soil which is so marked a characteristic of continental peoples, and especially of the French. True, we are assured by those excellent *doctrinaires* who advocate a peasant proprietary, that

this sentiment is due to the fact that in France the land belongs to the many and not to the few, but I believe this is a statement that does not hold good on close examination.

This dislike to country life and work on the part of our own rural proletariat is the more distressing, when one recollects that of all the three classes which depend on the land for their livelihood—landlords, tenants, and labourers—the latter is the only one whose lot has not deteriorated of recent years. The agricultural labourer of to-day earns better wages, is better housed, and can buy every commodity and necessity of life twenty-five per cent. cheaper than was the case forty years ago; his children are educated free of expense to him, his status has improved in every way; and yet, if he can possibly avoid it, he will not earn his living on the land.

This is a lamentable state of affairs of national importance, and many remedies are propounded for its improvement; chief among them being on one hand a return to Protection, and on the other the creation of peasant-proprietors. That we shall some day revert to a modified description of the former had been my private opinion long before Mr. Chamberlain burst his fiscal bombshell among us; but the latter is an innovation that could never permanently succeed in modern England. I am a firm believer in small holdings, of from fifty to two hundred acres occupied by tenant farmers, and I am equally in favour of giving agricultural labourers allotments of such size as they can conveniently cultivate in their own time; but the creation of a class of small free-

holders of from twenty to fifty acres is a scheme that would be doomed to failure. It is possible, perhaps probable, that small colonies of these petty farmers might succeed for a while, but in course of time the inevitable would come to pass: the thriftless, or unfortunate, would go to the wall, and their property be acquired by the more energetic members of the community; and the scheme resolve itself into a mere question of the survival of the fittest.

Even more difficult of solution would be the problem of dealing with the inheritance of these tiny freeholds. To subdivide them would be obviously absurd, and failing the rigid enforcement of a law of primogeniture, in a couple of generations the land would be mortgaged twice over, and the last state of its owners be worse than the first. Some of us may possibly have read "*La Terre*," a revolting and loathsome work, but a most telling and terrible indictment of peasant proprietorship; for the author holds no brief either for or against this, but simply describes it as it is.

To my mind the exodus from the land of the agricultural labourer is due, not to the fact that he finds his wages insufficient, nor that the land he tills is not his own, but simply to a reaction against the monotony of his existence. The craving for excitement, pleasure, luxury,—call it by what name you will—is in the blood of the present generation; it originated with the aristocracy, from them it worked its way through the middle classes down to the mechanics of the city, and now it has infected the rural population.

July 15th.—I have been otter-hunting to-day, a rare, in the sense of infrequent, sport in this part of the world. The meet was at eight o'clock, ten miles away, and, consequently, I had to rise a great deal earlier this morning than is either my wont or my pleasure. I suppose I was “born tired,” for all my life long to get out of bed, whether on the finest summer- or the coldest winter-morning, has ever been one of my greatest trials; and I am fully of Whyte-Melville’s opinion that “the hour of dawn, as it is the coldest, seems also the most melancholy of the twenty-four.” Moreover, I doubt whether there be any household in Great Britain where really hot shaving-water is obtainable at 5.30 A.M. (though one’s bath, *per contra*, is cold enough in all conscience), while the meal which one’s outraged domestics supply half-an-hour later is not such as to tempt a capricious appetite ordinarily accustomed to break its fast three or four hours afterwards. This in itself is sufficient to derange a middle-aged digestion, a state of affairs aggravated, in my case at all events, by an immoderate consumption of tobacco at an unusual hour.

Still, I must freely confess that one forgets all these petty discomforts, which after all are the outcome of mere matters of habit, when one is once abroad on such a lovely summer morning as to-day. Not a cloud in the perfect blue sky, and the air at once fresh but warm, for the “breeze of morning” which invariably heralds the dawn —what a profound observer of nature Tennyson was!—had long since died away. The roads lay white and dusty, though the meadows were drenched and sparkling

with dew ; but the haymakers were already at work, and the fragrance of the fresh-turned grass filled the country-side. Every hedge, every coppice, I passed rang with the melody of a hundred happy birds ; the lark hung thrilling and trilling in the clear, fresh sky ; the whole earth glowed at the touch of the summer sun, like a beautiful girl blushing to womanhood beneath her lover's kiss ; and as I rode along the quiet green lanes I forgot my cold shaving-water and my luke-warm breakfast, and added another paving-stone to the infernal regions by registering a silent determination to get up early every morning of my life.

Hounds were already moving off when I reached the meeting-place, and I had just time to stable my bicycle at a farmhouse, and catch them up as they threw off. It was a mixed pack of pure rough-haired otter-hounds, and draft fox-hounds, which, useful as the combination may be for working purposes, seemed rather unorthodox to my old-fashioned ideas. Surely an otter-hound should be used for hunting otters, and a fox-hound for hunting foxes ? Not that I have any right to express an opinion on the matter, for my experience of otter-hunting is of the smallest, nor is it a sport over which I can raise any very great enthusiasm. Perhaps if I saw more of it I should rate it higher. We were not long in coming on the drag of our quarry ; and then the burst of hound music it elicited was worth coming twice ten miles to hear, while the pace at which the hounds carried the line along the river-bank, and up the very stream itself, was extraordinary. We must have gone nearly two miles at

top-speed, and all the time the maddening chorus never ceased for a moment, and made one forget sobbing lungs and shaking legs in its "chime and jangle of sweet madness." But presently we checked—some of us not unwillingly, as I can testify—at the mouth of a drain under a great oak-tree, at the roots of which the swimming, baying, pack was raging and tearing. Master and huntsman dropped waist-deep into the river and held a council of war; then hounds were drawn off and the field made to stand back; a terrier, whining and quivering with excitement, was slipped into the mouth of the drain, and a strange silence followed. But soon a noise of muffled combat came from the very bowels of the earth; suddenly a slim wiry form glided noiselessly into the river, and shot ghost-like away, leaving a little trail of bubbles on the surface of the water; a second later the terrier, with one ear torn and bleeding, came scrambling and yapping from the drain; the eager pack broke away, scoring to cry, and all was once more noise and excitement.

The otter must be an animal of extraordinary vitality and endurance! For two mortal hours this one was hunted up and down the river from pool to pool, and holt to holt. Once it left the stream and ran for nearly half a mile through a rough, swampy wood, where the going was heart-breaking, and the midges bit with a fury that reminded me of Scandinavia. But at last it was marked into a deep, still pool, with low sandy banks and shallows above and below it, that were quickly lined with enthusiasts standing knee-deep in the water. Poor brute! It was very weary now, and it was a piteous sight to see

it rise again and again to the surface for a breath of air. The pool was full of eager, swimming, hounds that struck and snapped at it as it rose ; and much as I wished them to get the blood they so richly deserved, I none the less felt deep pity for the hunted beast, a feeling common to most of us, I expect, when we view a sinking fox, or, worse still, a beaten hare. But here the excitement of hunting proper, *i.e.* with horse as well as hound, was lacking, and one only felt compassion for the wild animal that was being done to death ; a sympathy that was entirely wasted, for suddenly there came a shout from the watchers on the shallow below, a splash and a scramble as one of them tried, and failed, to tail the otter ; and next moment it had slipped through them into a deep, rapid stream below them, and neither hounds nor huntsman could make anything of it again.

Then, of course, with the fine inconsistency of human nature, I felt rather annoyed that it had escaped.

July 17th.—Two or three years ago the ordinarily close-fisted Thomas fell a victim to the wiles of an itinerant vendor of pottery, and was induced to purchase a particularly hideous and vulgar terra-cotta vase, or tazza, with which he ornamented the garden, proposing in due season to grow fuchsias in it. He was so pleased with it that I did not like to hurt his feelings by ordering its removal ; but my forbearance was appreciated by the gods, who caused a mighty wind to arise and overthrow the tazza, breaking off its cup and leaving nothing but its stem and pedestal remaining. The deeply-mortified Thomas re-

moved the wreck to the Golgotha behind the potting-shed where he religiously preserves every kind of rubbish, and here, to my intense astonishment, I have just discovered that a tiny little blue-tit has utilised it for a nesting-place. Her nest of moss is placed inside the hollow pedestal, and in it are ten minute fledglings, whose mother has to ascend and descend the stem every time she leaves or returns to them; while the material for the nest must have been conveyed bit by bit the same way. The pedestal is exactly eight inches square, and the stem rather more in height, but the aperture at the top of the latter is barely an inch across; and what can first have induced the little bird to descend it, and, having done so, to select the interior of its base for a nesting-place passes my comprehension. However, despite their dark and exceedingly ill-ventilated nursery, the young birds appear to be flourishing; and will in due course, I hope, follow their mamma "up the chimney."

July 20th.—Riding home this evening I took a short cut through Lord W.'s park, and stopped to admire the red-deer stags, which, I think, are the finest I have ever seen, except, perhaps, those in Windsor Great Park. By the way, what a dislike horses have to the smell of deer. To-night the wind was setting from them to me, and I could hardly get my horse, the most sedate of "slaves," to approach them. While I was watching them ceaselessly toss their heads to get rid of the torturing flies that swarmed on their new sprouting horns, George, the head-keeper, an old acquaintance of mine, came up, and

we had a chat together. In the course of conversation I asked him if the deer invariably ate their shed antlers? "Yes," he answered, "when they gets the chance, but his lordship allows me to have the cast horns for myself, and I don't let the deer eat 'em more'n I can help."

"But what do you do with them?" I asked.

"I sells 'em to the head-keeper at ——, in Aberdeenshire."

"And what does he do with them?"

"Well, sir," said old George, with a deprecatory little chuckle, "taint none o' my business what he does with 'em, so long as he pays me honest, but I *rayther* fancy that he mounts 'em on hinds' heads that he kills in winter, and sells 'em in the summer to tourists as Scotch stags' heads!"

Of a truth every trade has its tricks!

Before we parted George told me of a curious occurrence which came under his notice this spring. Going to take a partridge's nest, of which he had got word from a farm-labourer, he found a rabbit actually sitting in the nest on the eggs, one of which it had broken. I have heard of all sorts of queer foster-mothers, but never of so strange a one as this, and but that my informant's character for veracity is unimpeachable, I should be inclined to think he was ronancing. My own theory is that the legitimate owner of the nest had deserted it, and that the rabbit chancing on it had said, Wemmick-like, "Halloa! here's a bed. Let's lie in it." Belinda's only comment on this anecdote when I retailed it to her

at dinner, was, "What a bore for the rabbit if the eggs had hatched out when it was sitting on them!"

July 22nd.—Thank goodness snakes are very uncommon in our neighbourhood, but I killed one this afternoon as it lay basking on a sunny bank. I only did so after a severe mental struggle, not, I am sorry to say, from humane motives, but because I have such an unreasoning horror of snakes that I could hardly bring myself to approach it. I know this feeling was not only puerile, but inexcusable, for the poor snake I slew to-day was not only a perfectly harmless, but I believe useful, reptile; yet by no possibility could I have passed by without trying to kill it. I take it that this abhorrence of snakes is common to most human beings, and it is easily understood; but the instinctive repugnance that some people have to such a purely domestic animal as a cat is very remarkable. I know personally a lady who not only cannot endure the sight of a cat, but knows intuitively if one be in her vicinity even when she cannot see it. I know others who have the same horror of rats—which is more easy of comprehension—and even of cows, but, most extraordinary of all, is the case of my friend T., who, a keen sportsman and hard rider to hounds, has the greatest dislike to, and even fear of, a dog. My own theory of this instinctive dislike of particular individuals to certain animals, which, like dogs or cows, are not repugnant to the community in general, is that it is due to atavism; that some more or less remote progenitor of the person so affected was injured, or

possibly killed, by one of these animals, and that an otherwise unaccountable dread re-appears from time to time in his descendants. Curiously enough, I believe there is a tradition in T.'s family that his great-great-grandfather, or some equally distant ancestor, was bitten by a mad dog, and after the barbarous custom of those days was promptly smothered between two mattresses. If this be true, it certainly goes far in support of my theory. Not that a dislike to dogs is inherent in every generation of the T. family; far from it. His eldest boy is the owner of the most hideous bulldog I have ever clapped eyes on, but which he necessarily has to leave behind him when he comes home for his holidays from Oxford. The enforced separation from his pet, coupled with the fact that he has to keep it "at walk" at his own expense, grievously afflicts the youth, and causes him to advert on his sires' lack of sympathy with his own tastes in a most irreverent manner.

But there are two sides to every question, and while snakes are undoubtedly abhorrent to three-fourths of the human race, there equally exist individuals to whom they are attractive. Though one does not often come across them in after-life, I fancy most of us must have known one of them in our school-days, an untidy, feckless boy, whose ingrained passion for natural history was always bringing him into conflict with the authorities and his school-fellows alike. Well do I recollect a certain "Jumpy" B., who had the next room to me at my Tutor's, and who was never without a snake, or a white rat, or generally both of them, which used to share his

ineals and his couch alike, and which were the cause of endless friction between him and the rest of the House. Poor Jumpy! I had almost forgotten his existence, until four years ago I came across his name in a list of casualties at Ladysmith.

July 22nd.—B., who lunched with us to-day, said rather a good thing. The *pièce-de-résistance* of our repast happened to be hashed mutton: most excellent of dishes when properly cooked. The conversation turned on the proper method of preparing it, and Belinda instanced the difficulty of inducing one's cook to give it exactly the right suspicion—flavour is too strong an expression—of that agreeable esculent, the onion. If too little of this is apparent, the hash is not complete; if too much, it tastes of nothing else. “Exactly,” said B., “a case of *l'oignon fait la force.*”

This put me in mind of the dictum—erroneously, I trust—attributed to Soyer, that the onion in itself should never appear in a salad; it being only necessary for the person who mixes this to chew a leaf of garlic during the operation!

July 25th.—A letter from Jack, who has been ranging his moors with pointers, with a view to ascertaining what show of birds he will have this season. He writes rather dolefully, and says he never remembers having seen such small coveys, or such late birds; but then he is always a pessimist. *Inter alia*, he mentions that he came across a brood of young birds, all a pale buff or cream colour,

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though the old hen was of ordinary plumage. His keeper is tremendously exercised about these birds, and begs they may not be shot when the Twelfth comes round, as he confidently expects they will form the foundation of a buff-coloured variety of grouse!

I recollect once seeing two or three of these etiolated grouse on a Cumbrian moor many years ago, but I think they are very rare; and I have no idea what can be the cause of their abnormal colouring. Of course albification is common enough among pheasants, and a very famous taxidermist once told me that, as regards them, it was invariably due to a diseased liver, but how far this is true, or whether grouse are similarly affected, I cannot say. Moreover, I am convinced that with pheasants these anomalies of colour and plumage are to a certain extent, hereditary, and to a very great one, local. Every year I help to shoot the coverts of two of my friends, whose estates lie about five miles apart. On the one I never remember to have seen a pied bird; on the other, and especially in one particular wood, at least seven or eight per cent. of the pheasants are more or less variegated with white.

July 29th.—Last night to the dinner of our local Agricultural Society, an annual function when the lion lies down with the lamb, and where landlord, agent, and tenant, meet to consume underdone joints and sodden fruit-pies, washed down with port, whose father-grape grew fat on the summers of Hamburg and not Lusitania. Warmed by this, they profess the noblest sentiments for

one another, sentiments that are less *en évidence* when rent-day comes round; and I confess to having felt a little sceptical last night, when I saw my Radical friend, Mr. Tiplady, pledge "Fox-hunting" in a bumper of the generous fluid.

None the less, there is still a strong survival of the old feudal feeling among tenant-farmers, and personally I know no class so little affected by the democratic tendency of the age as they are. There is an inherent something about either the ownership or the occupation of land which produces a fine natural conservatism of ideas; while, in addition, tenants are wise enough to see how indissolubly their welfare is bound up with that of their landlords. By this, however, I do not mean to imply that they are not fully alive to their own interests, nor backward in availing themselves of the various Acts of Parliament which modern beneficent legislation so frequently bestows on them. Nowadays it really seems as though every successive Government, be it Radical or Conservative, is convinced that the land-owning class is the one best suited by fortune and temperament to bear the heaviest burden. As with the old whist axiom, "When in doubt, play trumps," so it is with every Chancellor of the Exchequer, "When in need of money, squeeze it out of land." I think it was when introducing his Death Duties Bill that Sir William Harcourt (himself, be it noted, a scion of a great land-owning family) remarked—I quote from memory—that there is a certain pride or pleasure of ownership of land that merits

taxation.¹ Now this theory may possibly hold good in the case of, say, a South African millionaire who purchases an estate as a plaything, and expects no pecuniary return for the capital he so invests. He, lucky dog, is in the enviable position of being able to talk of "my trees," "my farms," "my pheasants," or, like the great Porthos, when he became Lord of De Bracieux and Pierrefonds, of "my air," without having to concern himself as to their cost; and I will charitably assume that this was the class of land-owner that Sir William Harcourt had in mind when passing his Bill.

Let us, however, take the far commoner instance of a small squire who inherits an estate which has supported his forefathers in comfort, if not affluence, and which, it was confidently expected, would perform the same good office for him and his descendants. But with the expense attendant on the maintenance of an estate double what it was fifty years ago; with rents reduced thirty, and more, per cent., and the cost of living proportionately higher, this is no longer possible; and the increased burdens on land, coupled with the final blow of the Death Duties, is slowly crushing the lesser country gentleman out of existence as surely as the repeal of the Corn Laws did the yeoman farmers of that generation. Take the case of my friend R., who died but two years ago. When comparatively a young man he inherited a heavily mortgaged estate, and for twenty years he scraped and pinched to

¹ Since these lines were first written, the Right Honourable gentleman in question has himself become a great land-owner, and is therefore most agreeably situated for testing the justice of his conviction.

redeem his ancestral acres. He let his house ; he let his shooting ; he lived in the simplest fashion, and then, just as matters were recovering themselves, strong healthy man as he was, influenza and pneumonia carried him off in a week. Now, many a broad acre just freed of debt has had to be re-mortgaged, and his son has to face much the same state of affairs that his father did a quarter of a century ago. The irony of the thing is that, had the original mortgages not been redeemed, they might have been set against the capital value of the estate, and so reduced the amount payable for Death Duty.

July 31st.—Most of us in our time must have laughed over Leech's delightful picture of the Cockney barber and “the 'air of the 'ead, and the h'air of the h'atmosphere.” I had an exact parallel to this to-day when Thomas asked for a new “hedge clipper,” a request to which I at first demurred, on the grounds that this is not the time of year for clipping hedges. Subsequent explanation, however, revealed that the article required was not for “clipping the 'edges, but”—with tremendous aspiration—“for trimming the h'edges of the grass borders.”

A U G U S T

Aug. 2nd.—Dining last night with A., I was foolhardy enough to supplement a too copious dessert of raspberries and cream with two or three glasses of a curious old Madeira, whose pedigree my host could trace for more than half a century, with the inevitable result that the noble vintage, resenting the slight I had put upon it, retaliated by giving me a most uneasy night. Not that I had what the French term *une nuit blanche*, for I slept in snatches up till four o'clock this morning, but the "comfortable bird" that broods "o'er the troubled sea of the mind" brought me no visions of "golden palaces nor strange minstrelsy," but only much oppression of mind and body. Once fairly awake, however, sleep deserted me altogether, so that after much feverish tossing to and fro I felt I could lie a-bed no longer, and slipping on some flannels, I let myself out of the house and came into the garden.

The sun was shining bright and warm from an unclouded sky, and the flowers were lifting their heads and opening their buds responsive to its touch; the lawn shone sparkling with a thousand diamonds of dew, and a last fragrant breath from the fading blossoms of the lime-trees was borne to me on the breeze of morning. The birds were all up and doing: the sparrows and

starlings chattering and chirping round the eaves, but the blackbirds and thrushes, knowing how injurious it is to strain the voice on an empty stomach, were furiously breaking their fast on the currant bushes, while high overhead the few remaining swifts were hawking tirelessly in the cool fresh air. I wonder if there be any truth in the country theory that swifts remain on the wing all night, and how it is capable of proof?

I walked to the end of the garden and looked over the sunk fence: there was a simultaneous twinkle of white scuts as two rabbits flashed into their burrow, leaving behind them a tiny son or daughter, that reared itself on its hind-quarters the better to inspect me; the very picture of youthful innocence, as yet free from the imputation of barking young trees, or any other of the crimes peculiar to its race. The cattle in the pasture were all lying down, and so was old Captain, the pensioned cart-horse; but the sheep were up and feeding, as I daresay they had been all night: I do not believe there is any limit to the ovine appetite. The sight of so many happy creatures and the glory of the summer's morn consoled me for my want of sleep, and going back to the house I drank a glass of pure water, and finding a half-smoked pipe of the previous evening, I defied at once the common laws of health, and the wigging I should get should Belinda chance to wake and spy me from her chamber-window, by relighting it. To begin the day by smoking before breakfast is an absolutely indefensible habit of which I have not been guilty since early manhood, and the first few whiffs this morning put

the clock back a quarter of a century. They brought back the flavour of the cigar—lit as one left a heated London ballroom to stroll home to bed through the strangely silent squares and streets; of the pipe—a super-excellent one this—which followed the morning plunge into the sparkling Norwegian salmon river, and even recalled the forgotten occasion when, on my way home from scrambling up a Highland hill by moonlight to see the sun rise, I swam the little loch in front of the lodge with a lighted pipe in my mouth to win a half-crown bet.

Ay de mi! Tobacco before breakfast in those days tasted very different to what it does now, and I soon relinquished my trial of it this morning, and crept quietly back to the unfailing refuge of the old and middle-aged—my bed.

Aug. 5th.—To the cricket match at W. Park. It happened that the home team was short of a player, and the services of the local policeman, one of the biggest and fattest men I ever clapped eyes on, were enlisted as a substitute. He modestly confessed to being “only a poorish player,” and indeed displayed the courage of ignorance by presently going in to face fast bowling on a bumpy wicket without gloves, and with only one pad on the wrong leg. Remonstrance and entreaty against such temerity were unavailing, and only met by the confident assurance that he “allus played loike that.” His subsequent performance reminded me of the man who “ad a h’over from Jackson.” The first ball he

received rose off the ground like a shot from a cannon, catching him fairly in that mysterious part of our anatomy known as "the wind," and stopped the game for three minutes, while the representative of the law rolled in speechless agony on the ground; the second, a vicious full pitch, caught him straight on his unguarded shin, and the third bowled him.

Aug. 8th.—It is the custom to speak of London, or at all events the west end of it, as deserted during the month of August; but I have just returned from spending twenty-four hours there, and perceived but little difference between its present appearance and that of two months ago. The chief outward and visible sign that I personally received that the season was over was finding my club closed for cleaning, and having to pay one and threepence instead of a shilling for a slice of mutton at the more mundane establishment which was tendering me temporary hospitality. I always feel rather like a fish out of water in a strange club in these circumstances, and have an uneasy feeling that its members and servants regard me as an interloper.

A propos of this the vicar, who belongs to the Attic Club, found on repairing to it last September that its members were for the present the guests of a neighbouring institution, the Martian. Entering this, he proceeded to hang his overcoat on the first vacant peg he saw in the hall, only, however, to be asked, with many apologies, by the hall-porter to select another one, as this was always used by General Shrapnel. Anxious

to oblige, the vicar at once transferred his coat to the adjoining peg, but with no better success, it was Admiral Cutwater's; while a third was Colonel Chutney's; when, despairing of further experiments, he handed the coat to the hall-porter, with the request that he would find a place for it in the "free seats"; a piece of ecclesiastical humour that I fear must have been wasted on the Martian janitor.

My business in London took me to the City, whither I repaired on the top of an omnibus, an eminence that offers the most agreeable opportunity for a philosophical study of mankind; though to my shame, be it said, that I did not arrive at this conclusion until recent years. In the days of my youth a young lady would scarcely have been allowed to drive in a hansom cab, and certainly not in an omnibus, while no self-respecting "swell" would have dared to enter the latter; but now I see beautifully-dressed young persons of both sexes making free and undisguised use of this useful vehicle,—a fact which redounds considerably to the credit of the present generation. Similarly I can remember the time when any unfortunate lady or gentleman whose means obliged them to travel "third class," did so "by stealth, and blushed to find it fame"; yet nowadays the practice seems universal, even among comparatively wealthy people.

In connection with this, my friend S., whose vocation of a lawyer obliges him to make occasional incursions into high life, once told me a delightful story. One of his clients, a very great personage, wishing to effect economy in his household expenditure, issued a fiat to

his house-steward that in future all servants not of “the room” were to travel by third, instead of as heretofore, by second-class, adding, as a sop to Cerberus, that “at present many ladies and gentlemen travel third class,” a singularly unflattering chain of reasoning to the unhappy class in question.

“Indeed, your Grace!” politely assented the great man’s great man, “I cannot speak from personal knowledge, but I am informed that the lower order of clergy habitually do so.”

One thing, however, is essential to perfect enjoyment on the top of an omnibus—the possession of the front seat, which, while precluding the possibility of receiving the bouquet of a fellow-passenger’s tobacco in your face, gives you an uninterrupted field of vision, and enables you to talk to the driver, a person in my experience of infinite humour and knowledge of the world. Equally admirable to me is the way in which these men drive. I imagine that an omnibus, which is so much wider than the animals which draw it, must be a most difficult vehicle to steer through a crowded thoroughfare; yet they effect this with the most perfect ease, and keep up a conversation with their passengers at the same time. Even more difficult must be the necessity of making both horses do an equal share of work when moving at a jog-trot; just as I believe that troops find it harder to perform intricate evolutions in slow time than in quick. Only yesterday I noticed how one of the horses behind which I was sitting was a slug, while its companion was an eager, willing brute; yet the

driver contrived to keep the former up to its collar, and this too, without recourse to his whip. I commented on this to the man, who, not ill-pleased, told me I had hit on the most difficult part of his work, and that to drive a slug took far more out of him than the hardest puller. The animal in question, a very fine roan mare, was, it appeared, a Canadian, and, according to my friend, three-fourths of the Canadian 'bus-horses are either soft or bad-tempered, the result, in his opinion, of being badly broken when young. Nor did the honest driver speak without authority, for he told me he "had been pretty nigh all over Canada; had served as a young man in the Red River Expedition under Lord Wolseley; had had a grant of land somewhere about what is now the centre of the town of Winnipeg; had never troubled to go and look at it, but traded it away at once; would have been a rich man if he'd stuck to it, but didn't regret it much; there's no place like old England, and"—with a look of absolute affection on seething Cheapside—"no town like London."

People talk of the longing of the Swiss for his mountains; of the Parisian for the asphalte of his boulevards, but in good truth I believe the fascination of London for the Cockney surpasses both.

Aug. 12th.—Few writers were keener observers of the lesser foibles of human nature than Whyte-Melville, and when in "Market Harborough" he makes Mr. Sawyer journey from the Old Country to the shires by way of London, he points out how an Englishman, no matter

whence or whither he may be bound, nor what loss of time or money such a proceeding may involve, invariably, when travelling, prefers to reach his destination *via* the Metropolis. The truth of this axiom was brought home to me last night when Belinda and I travelled down to Scotland by the night mail from King's Cross, for this is hardly our most direct route from home to Inverness-shire. In this, of course, we were chiefly actuated by Belinda's desire to be *dans le mouvement*; but while I am bound to admit that the oft-described spectacle of the departure of the Limited Mail for the North, from one of the great London termini at this season of the year, is not without its attraction, I personally prefer to travel on a less crowded occasion.

The ponderous train, already trembling and throbbing with the pent-up energy of the huge engine that will presently drag it along those shining rails at the rate of fifty miles an hour; the belated passengers, attended by perspiring porters labouring under gun-cases and bundles of fishing-rods, vainly seeking admission into compartments that have been full for the last twenty minutes; the impassive, drab-coated lackeys and trim ladies'-maids guarding jewel-cases and dressing-bags, the fair owners of which are busy at the book-stall laying in a stock of ephemeral literature they will never trouble to read; the constant stream of eager hurrying faces strangely white under the glare of the electric light; and the general air of pleasurable excitement all combine to raise the spirits of even those to

whom the scene, alas! has no longer the charm of novelty, and, for a time at all events, atone for the discomfort of travel in a train packed to its utmost capacity.

But when we were fairly launched on our journey, and had been flying through the peaceful summer night under the light of the harvest moon for two or three hours, there came the inevitable reaction attendant on a prolonged railway-journey. The incessant clank and rattle of the great swinging train became well-nigh intolerable, and, though we snatched an uneasy slumber during the night, dawn found us cramped and feverish with the dust of travel in our mouths; and it was with a feeling of intense relief that at last we woke to find we were slackening speed over the green haughs that surround the fair city of Perth, and to see the morning sun shining on the rolling Tay.

Oh! the delight of leaving the hot, stuffy railway-carriage and inhaling the fresh air blowing down, cool and pure, from the Highlands. Oh! the pleasure of plunging one's dusty, travel-heated, face into clean water. How good, too, the subsequent hot coffee and salmon-cutlets which seem the perennial breakfast dish at Perth station! How pleasant the cigarette afterwards, when one had secured seats in the Highland train, and had time to look for friends and acquaintances among one's fellow-travellers. By the way, I was immensely struck by the clear, fresh complexions of the ladies after their eight hours' journey on a hot summer's night, and I could not help drawing an inward comparison between

their appearance and that of the fair foreigners who, on their way to the Riviera, crowd from the *train-de-luxe* at much the same hour of the morning to demand *café-au-lait* at the *buffets* of Avignon or Lyons.

Aug. 14th.—Out shooting to-day we had a most delightful instance of a dog's instinct or sagacity—I hardly know which to call it. There has been a great deal of sickness in my host's kennel, and so, being short of dogs, Andrew, the keeper, was despatched to Kingussie to try and pick up some makeshifts. By hook or by crook he managed to secure a couple, one of which was sent out with Tom and myself, who were shooting together to-day. It was a small, melancholy-looking setter, just emerging from puppyhood, which, although fairly well broken, had never "taken the field" before. Its mean appearance did not lead us to anticipate that it would prove a very useful adjunct to our day's sport, but in this we were agreeably disappointed, for except a puppy-like tendency to potter and make false points, no dog could have worked better nor more conscientiously, and that it was certainly endowed with reasoning power this anecdote will show. As we came to the edge of a little lochan a brace of grouse rose and flew across it. Rather foolishly, as we had no retriever with us, I shot them right and left, and they fell in the very middle of the little tarn. There was no breeze to drift them to shore, and though we vainly endeavoured to bring them to us by hurling stones and lumps of peat over them, it seemed at last as though we should have either

to swim for them, or leave them; when the young dog, which had been squatting on its haunches watching our fruitless efforts, rose, waded into the water, swam out to the *farthest* bird, brought it back, dropped it at our feet, and then just as quietly returned and fetched the other. Now this must have been pure instinctive reasoning on the dog's part; it had not been taught to retrieve, for all subsequent efforts to induce it to do so, whether on land or in water, proved unavailing; but it argued in its own mind that we evidently could not get the birds for ourselves, and that unless it did so for us we should waste a great deal of valuable time over them, which it could spend more agreeably to itself in hunting. It evinced no satisfaction over its achievement, and treated our commendation of it with absolute indifference.

Again, late in the evening, just as we were giving up shooting, it led us for a long way down to the edge of a deep, sluggish, peat-stream. Here it stopped, crouching, and indicating to us as plainly as it could that the grouse it was winding were on the other side of the stream, but as this was too wide to jump and too deep to wade, we were reluctantly obliged to call it off its point and retrace our footsteps. However, the dog was terribly exercised in spirit by this: it evidently thought it was suspected of making a false point, for doing which it had been reproved more than once during the day, and it followed us unwillingly, looking back over its shoulder. At last, however, its injured feelings became too strong for it; it broke away, heed-

less of objurgations and whistlings, galloped back as hard as it could to the stream, plunged in, scrambled out on the other side, went direct to a covey of grouse, flushed it, and then, satisfied that it had redeemed its character for veracity, came straight back to us.

There is a great future before that dog if only it be properly treated.

Aug. 15th.—At dinner last night the conversation turned on the dictum that Scotch people have no sense of humour, a theory from which I dissented, for in their own “pawky” vein I consider them a most humorous race. In doing so, however, I felt I was acting very chivalrously, for only once in my life have I been guilty of a good thing, and then cruel fate ordained that I should waste it on a North Briton.

“ ‘Twas my first-born, and oh ! how I prized it !
My darling, my treasure, my own !
This brain and none other devised it—”

and lo ! my one little grain of Attic salt lit on the cold and unresponsive soil of Caledonia.

Several years ago I happened to be travelling from Edinburgh to Perth, the only other occupant of my carriage being an elderly gentleman engaged in reading the *Scotsman*. This he presently courteously offered to me, remarking as he did so, “I see it is rumoured they are going to create Mr. — a peer. I should like to know what he has done to deserve a peerage, beyond making a fortune in the opium trade.”

“Indeed,” I answered airily, “evidently a case of

opium cum dignitate," and the fellow—a Modern Athenian too, for his speech bewrayed him—never saw it.

I retailed this anecdote last night, and found that I had a partner in misfortune, Mrs. X. recounting how she had once tried to joke with a Scotchman, with the result that not only did her pleasantry fall flat, but made the subject of it very angry into the bargain. It appeared that a certain rather pompous Highland laird—the sort of man who prays on the Sabbath for the adjacent country of England—sought her advice as to a suitable costume in which to appear at a fancy dress ball to which they were both bidden. “But,” said Mrs. X., in all good faith, “what need have you of a fancy dress? Go in your kilt.”

The Scotchman regarded her with an offended eye. “In *my* country,” he remarked stiffly, “the kilt is not regarded as *fancy* dress.”

“Oh! indeed,” replied the lady, who has a sharp little tongue of her own, “then I suppose trousers are—and would you believe it?” she added plaintively, “the creature was *furious*.”

Aug. 19th.—To-day I had an ideal day’s shooting. The weather was perfect, sunny and warm, yet with just a suspicion of autumn in the clear atmosphere; the dogs worked beautifully; the grouse lay well, but not *too* well; and in Tom, who is my host, I had a most congenial companion. We got thirty-two brace of grouse besides “extras,” than which no man of mode-

rate tastes can desire a better day's sport. But to me the chief pleasure of the day was in the glorious scenery amid which we were shooting. Tom's moor is only separated from a famous deer-forest by a mile-wide loch; and lying smoking my pipe after lunch, while I watched the play of light and shadow on hill and corrie as the gentle summer clouds drifted across the sky, Kingsley's beautiful lines came back to me:

“Oh, the wafts o' heather honey, and the music of the brae,
As I watch the great harts feeding nearer, nearer a' the day.
Oh! to hark the eagle screaming, sweeping, ringing round
the sky.”

If one wrote pages one could not express the poetry of sport and wild life more eloquently than is done in these three lines, and yet there must be many to whom they are meaningless, and who have never heard the “music of the brae.” But only let such a one go up by himself on a fine summer's day into a high place among the moors, or even the south-country downlands, and, unless he be absolutely devoid of imagination, he will do so as the gentle south wind comes whispering through the heather, or over the short sheep-trimmed turf. For then, like the outlaw of the poem, he will hear the mysterious voice of nature telling him of the glory of the great silent hills, and the freedom of the sweet pure air that wanders over them. That is the “music o' the brae,” which I tasted to the full this afternoon, looking out across the dimpling loch on to the sun-flecked Highland mountains, while Tom slept the post-prandial sleep

of the middle-aged sportsman, and the ghillies sucked at their pipes of reluctant twist in the background.

Perfect, however, as Kingsley's lines are, I think, judging from my own limited experience, that the eagle "screaming" is fine poetical license, though it is certainly curious that a man like him, country born and bred, and a first-rate naturalist and sportsman to boot, should make such a slip. Yet in "Yeast," which I have just been re-reading, he makes his hero go perch-fishing in April, and talks of Lord Minchampstead celebrating the 1st of September by exterminating every hare and *pheasant* on his Estate—this latter a passage worthy of Ouida or Marie Corelli.

Aug. 23rd.—To the Kirk at —, where, to my astonishment, we had *inter alia*, "Hymns Ancient and Modern" to the accompaniment of a harmonium. As we drove home I commented to Tom on the change that has come over the Scottish Church no less than the Scottish "Sawbath," when he told me the following anecdote of his youth, delightfully illustrative of the Calvinistic feeling of that period. It happened that as a small boy he was sent to this very church in charge of the head gardener, a serious man from Ayrshire. It was a lovely summer's day, more fitted in Master Tom's estimation for the tickling of trout or despoiling of birds' nests than listening to a long-winded preacher; but holding his companion in great awe, he wisely kept his opinions to himself. The gardener tramped gloomily along the moorland road without speaking a word, but when some

two miles had been covered in absolute silence, youthful flesh and blood could stand it no longer, and, by way of opening up a little agreeable conversation, he adopted the course common in similar circumstances to nine-tenths of the human race.

"It's a lovely day, M'Allister," he timidly piped. M'Allister took not the slightest notice of the observation, but tramped steadily on with a very dour expression on his "Sawbath" face. Presently Tom again feebly hazarded his views as to the beauty of the day. Once more absolute silence on the part of M'Allister, but at a third repetition of the remark, he stopped, and eyeing the little boy with the cold eye of reproof, he said in solemn tones, "Aye, it's a graun' day, Maister Tom, but it's *no' a day to be taarkin' aboot days!*"

Aug. 24th.—Late last night a messenger came over from Sir J. R., the tenant of the deer-forest which marches with Tom's estate, to offer him, or any of his guests, a day's stalking, the stags being extraordinarily forward this year. Like the kind fellow he is, my host not only insisted on my going in his place, but fitted me out with rifle and cartridges into the bargain. Deer-stalking does not come in my way every day, and I started off this morning in high feather, but returned this evening with rather bedraggled plumage, my day's amusement having resolved itself into a mere succession of disasters; and I cannot help feeling that fate has treated me a little scurvily to-day. I left home at nine o'clock of a lovely sunny morning, and drove nine miles

to an appointed tryst in the forest, where I met the head stalker and a ghillie. Here I was informed that the wind was in the wrong "airt," and that in consequence, we should have to make a long circuit before we could even begin to "spy," as the "teer would ahl be on the march." We then proceeded to follow their example in the literal sense of the expression by tramping for three hours up and down hill—chiefly up, it seemed to me—when I called a halt for refreshment, and made the agreeable discovery that my lunch, flask, and waterproof had been left in the dog-cart! Hector, the stalker, had only a "piece oat-cake" with him, having, I suppose, looked to sharing my modest repast, but the ghillie had some very dry, and, I may add, dirty, bread and cheese wrapped up in a bit of newspaper, which he generously divided with me, which we washed down with some excellent cold spring-water. After an interval for tobacco we resumed our walk, but it was not until late in the afternoon that we came upon a shootable stag, by which time the sky had become overcast and the air perceptibly chill. We commenced our stalk, and, after half-an-hour's creeping and crawling, reached the shelter of a rock, where we lay on some exceedingly damp moss waiting for the stag to rise. This it deferred doing until the whole of my clothing was thoroughly imbued with the moisture of the ground on which I was lying, and when it did at last get up, it always contrived to keep a hind, or a small stag between itself and my rifle. Soon, however, something alarmed the deer—I think it was Hector, who would keep putting his head up; Hector said it was the ghillie, and

the ghillie said it was a shift of wind—and as they began to move off I got a momentary chance at the stag. But I was wet, cramped, and shivering; Hector was gutturally imploring me to shoot, “noo, noo,” and I felt even as I pulled the trigger that I had missed. I managed to get in another barrel before the stag was out of sight; but having just failed to hit it when it was standing still a hundred and fifty yards away, I entertained but little hope of doing so at double that distance, when it was galloping across some very uneven ground, and my bullet found its billet in the face of the opposite hill.

At that hour of the evening it was hopeless to look for more deer, and we had nothing for it but to retrace our footsteps across several miles of mountain and morass to where the dog-cart had been ordered to await me. *En route* a Scotch mist came on, which soon turned to Scotch rain of the heaviest variety, so that by the time I reached the road I was literally drenched to the skin. Here a final blow assailed me: the driver of the dog-cart had been told to meet us at the “wee stane bridge,” but there being two bridges on the road he had naturally selected the wrong one, and I had another three miles to walk before I finally found the “machine,” and was able to wrap an ulster round my shivering form. I arrived at home very dispirited, and with grim forebodings of colds and rheumatism, but after a hot bath before a blazing fire, Belinda exhibited ammoniated quinine, which Tom supplemented with '89 champagne at dinner—shades of St. John! who used to do a similar day's work to mine, and sup off oatmeal “crowdy” in a

shepherd's bothy—and I now feel quite cheerful and a little inclined to swagger over my pedestrian performances.

Aug. 26th.—Travelling south yesterday I noticed we did not strike the tourist zone until we reached Pitlochry, where we first encountered a few specimens of that ubiquitous class; but at Edinburgh, where we slept the night, they swarmed in all their glory, the ladies in Tam o' Shanters, and the gentlemen in complete shooting-suits that will never go a-shooting. By the way, what is there about the term tourist that so raises the gorge of the average Briton? I am occasionally one myself, and would like to be one oftener did the *res angusta domi* permit; but when, as at present, I chance to be travelling in search of sport, and not merely of bracing air or beautiful scenery, I feel myself a sort of superior being entitled to look down upon my less fortunate brethren. I am afraid it is a snobbish feeling, and one's only excuse, if excuse it be, is that it is common to all mankind. Nowhere is it more to the fore than on the passenger steamers to Norway, where the unhappy wight whose luggage does not include a rod-box or a gun-case, is looked on as a pariah.

Aug. 27th.—On our way home, we have come to spend two or three days with some friends at North Berwick. I am not an enthusiastic admirer of the sea; “the great sweet mother” can have had no share in my parentage: I see no particular beauty in it; I usually suffer from nausea when I venture on its heaving bosom, and to

bathe in it upsets my liver. I have, therefore, never been able to appreciate the feeling which prompts so many of my friends to leave a comfortable home and pay exorbitant prices for bad cooking and general discomfort in seaside lodgings: ozone may be an admirable tonic, but it is usually procured at too high a cost.

Consequently, I am not so smitten with the charms of North Berwick as Belinda, though I am bound to confess that I have never breathed finer nor more bracing air; but privately I know that my real grievance against the place lies in the fact that it is absolutely and entirely given up to golf. Every soul in the place—man, woman, and child—plays it from morn to night; they sally forth immediately after breakfast, and, with the exception of the interval they grudgingly give to lunch, pursue the game all day: they talk about nothing else, and, I have no doubt, dream about it at night, until I confess to finding *toujours perdrix* a little wearisome. Moreover, this tyranny of golf denies me my chief seaside pleasure of lounging about with a book and a pipe, for scarcely have I found a comfortable resting-place among the sand-hills ere a Scotchman in a red jacket roars “Fore” at me, and, without waiting for a reply, sends a ball whizzing like a bullet about my ears. Therefore, as I do not seek my emotions in courting death, or partial disablement for life, I have abandoned the seashore and taken to exploring the inland country on a hired bicycle.

Haddingtonshire, or, as the natives invariably style it, East Lothian, is not a particularly beautiful country, but its farming is a sight to behold, and it appears to

hold nearly as many partridges to the acre as Norfolk itself. None the less, only last evening it afforded me one of the most lovely views on which I have ever feasted my eyes; for, coming about sunset to the little village of Gullane, I left my bicycle at its inn and climbed to the crest of the gentle grassy hill which lies behind it. From my feet the ground fell away in vast sweeps of short green turf to where the Firth of Forth lay calm and blue, gently lipping its curving sands with a line of white foam. A great ocean-going steamer was steadily throbbing its way out to sea past the little islets where Alan Breck Stewart took boat for France, and across the water lay the pleasant shores of Fife dotted with white towns, with the green Ochils rising behind them. To my left a little village with a grey kirk-tower and a great stone mansion, set amid green lawns and billowing woods, and beyond again yellow corn and green turnips, green turnips and yellow corn, rising field above field to meet the purple Lanimermoors. To the west the Firth stretched away for miles, the smoke of a score of little fishing towns rising straight and thin in the still autumn evening, until it narrowed to the very feet of the most beautiful town in the world; at that distance little more than a blur of mist, yet with Arthur's Seat and the Castle rock, nay, the very buildings on the Calton Hill and the chimneys of Leith, standing out sharp and clear against a blood-red sunset:

“... in evening’s gleam
Its temples and its palaces did seem
Like fabrics of enchantment piled to Heaven.”

Behind it rose the Pentlands, and further still, like clouds on the horizon, the distant hills of the Highland line.

I have rarely seen a view which impressed me so deeply, and this too in defiance of the fact that I have not a drop of Scotch blood in my veins. It is curious that out of the hundreds of beautiful, or striking, panoramas one sees in the course of one's life, so few should remain imprinted on one's memory. I can only recall two I have never forgotten: one, my first sight of Florence from Fiesole on a fine afternoon in late spring; the other, the look-out from some nameless spur of the Black Forest over sun-washed Suabia; and to these, I think, will now be added my last night's prospect from Gullane hill.

Aug. 28th.—Travelling to Edinburgh on my way south this morning, I had in my compartment two callow Scotch youths. One, a serious young man, looked like a candidate for the ministry; the other, of more mundane appearance, I set down as a “writer body” *in posse*. The latter had been spending his holiday at Dieppe, where he had been much gratified by the foreign custom of ladies and gentlemen bathing together. He painted its attractions in glowing colours to his friend, and asked why so agreeable a practice should not be adopted in Scotland? But the serious youth was scandalised at the very idea of such a thing, and refused to discuss the subject. “Ar thenk,” he said frigidly, “ar prefair oor nawtional custom o’ the male and the faymale bathing apairrt!”

Aug. 29th.—Now is the season of the year when country folk indulge in an outburst of mild, open-air dissipation, and the young men and maidens of the neighbourhood are busy gathering roses while they may, at garden-party, cricket match, croquet tournament, and every conceivable form of outdoor amusement. Every afternoon one meets them, packed into the family wagonette, or spinning along the road on their bicycles, bound for some hospitable house, whither I too am frequently haled, under protest, by Belinda. Not that I really dislike going as much as I think it incumbent on me to pretend that I do, for, provided that I am not expected to drink claret cup and am allowed to smoke, I enjoy meeting my friends, and watching the young folk disport themselves according to the fashion of the present day. None the less—and here I know I am treading on delicate ground—I am privately of opinion that, as far as ladies are concerned, the present craze for violent outdoor exercise is overdone. In this I am aware that I am running counter to popular opinion, which triumphantly points to the greatly increased stature of the present generation of English girls as proof of the invigorating results of open air and hard exercise. Against open air I have not a word to say, nor against exercise in moderation, but that the latter can be, and often is, carried to excess is undeniable. Only this afternoon at H. Park, where eleven young ladies armed with bats were playing a match at cricket against eleven gentlemen equipped with broomsticks, I was particularly struck by the captain of the ladies'

team, a damsel whose mother I remember thirty years ago as the prettiest girl in the county. Miss B. is also pretty, but persistent hard exercise in all weathers has robbed her of the lovely complexion for which her mother was famous: true, she stands 5 feet 7 inches in a pair of very substantial brown leather shoes, while her mamma was probably three inches shorter, but she has run entirely to bone and muscle, and, to use a racing expression, is trained as fine as a star, and carries no lumber. Now a modified amount of—let us call it plumpness—is, in the opinions of artists, sculptors, and mankind in general, essential to female beauty, but, alas! it is not an attribute of the athletic young females of to-day. To my old-fashioned notions the first requisite of a woman is womanliness, of which beauty of face and form is one of the chief essentials, but unlimited indulgence in violent outdoor sports, cricket, bicycling, beagling, otter-hunting, paper-chasing and, most odious of all games for a woman, hockey, cannot but have an unwomanly effect on a young girl's appearance, and in turn re-act on her mind. It has never been my ill-fortune to meet a lady out shooting, but, should I ever do so, I shall go straight home, chiefly because I should be in mortal terror of being shot, but also because I do not consider shooting an amusement for women. In all field sports there exists an inevitable modicum of purely unintentional cruelty: that is to say, of wilful infliction of pain on the lower animals, and all sportsmen know the sickening sensation of hearing a wounded hare scream, or of seeing a sorely-stricken rabbit escape

into its burrow to die a lingering death; but if such things are painful to the hardened mind of man, how much more should they revolt the tender feelings of woman? No; let young girls ride, skate, dance, and play lawn-tennis in moderation, but let them leave field-sports and rough outdoor pastimes to those for whom they are naturally intended—men.

Aug. 30th.—Taking a stroll through M. Wood last evening, I was much annoyed to find the corpse of an owl dangling from the “Keeper’s tree” in company with stoats, weasels, jays, and gruesome specimens of the domestic cat, that, forsaking the hearth for the green-wood, had suffered the legitimate fate of outlaws. I always regard owls as most harmless, and indeed, from the quantity of mice and other small vermin they destroy, useful birds; and meeting Amos, the keeper, shortly afterwards, I upbraided him with the slaughter of this one. To my astonishment he solemnly declared that he had only shot it a few weeks ago, because he caught it in the very act “of lifting one o’ my young pheasants, nigh as big as a blagbird.” I had never suspected owls of being harmful to game, but I can rely on Amos’s veracity; he is different from most keepers, in that he is not a mere butcher who kills all wild creatures without discrimination; on the contrary, he is a rather intelligent man with a taste for natural history, and he assured me that up to now he had always spared owls—a statement of which there is ample proof in the numbers one still sees in the woods. However, even if

they occasionally pick up a young pheasant, they amply atone for it by the quantity of rats they destroy, and so I arranged that no more should be shot unless caught in *flagrante delicto*. Moreover, by the time owls are generally abroad, all good young pheasants and partridges should be safe under the maternal wing.

Aug. 31st.—Mr. Silas, the new curate, dined with us last night; a diffident young man, sprung from that lower middle class from which our clergy is too largely recruited nowadays, and whose slender claim to gentility lies in a Cambridge education. I confess to having found him a little heavy in hand, especially as he does not smoke, but he is not without a certain sense of humour, and told us an amusing anecdote of a recent trip to the seaside, whither he personally conducted a large party of Sunday school children and their parents. On the journey home, he overheard one of the latter, addressing another matron, ask, “Did you ‘ave a dip, Mrs. Brown?” “No, I didn’t,” replied Mrs. Brown confidentially, “our Tom ‘e worritted me crool to ‘ave one, but I sez to ‘im, No, I never ‘ad a bath yet, and I ain’t a-goin’ to begin ‘em at my time o’ life.”

Presuming “our Tom” to have been the lady’s husband, his anxiety as to her balneal intentions speaks for itself.

SEPTEMBER

Sept. 1st.—Following the example of certain metropolitan newspapers, our local Thunderer has thrown open its columns to a discussion on automobilism—Heavens! what a word!—thereby affording most excellent diversion to its readers, and unrivalled opportunity for the ungrammatical airing of grievances to scores of ardent, and for the most part, anonymous, correspondents. Each side exhibits a most uncompromising spirit towards the other, but while neither can claim much supremacy in argument, or rather invective, the malcontents, or anti-motorists, show an overwhelming numerical superiority. As regards this, only last week I met W., our county member, in the train, when he told me that until the introduction of Mr. Long's Bill he had no conception of the feeling that exists against motor-cars. Every post brought him such sheaves of protests from indignant, or apprehensive, constituents, that, had he been the most ardent of motorists, he could not have disregarded them, in view of the next general election. This did not surprise me, as I was fully aware of the unpopularity of motor-cars in rural England, and, indeed, I think that only those who live among, and constantly mix with, country folk have any idea of their intense dislike to them. I notice it on all sides and among all classes.

Judging from the correspondence in the newspaper, the chief reason for this is the feeling that motor-cars are the plaything of the rich, who utilise the public roads for their own amusement to the inconvenience or discomfort of their less affluent fellow-citizens; a John Bull contention that it is not easy to refute. Next to this is the danger which at present, whatever the future may hold forth, undoubtedly exists to other users of the highway, be they pedestrians, bicyclists, or horse-owners, but especially to the latter. Then there is the very real grievance of the dust, and finally the sentimental or æsthetic objection. This latter may sound a ridiculous complaint, but it is a very universal one, towards which I have considerable leaning myself.

Let us imagine the case of a man, peer or ploughman as you like, who, brought up amid rural surroundings, has an inherent and deep-rooted love of tranquil country life, and who is taking his pleasure in a contemplative stroll along a quiet lane in all its summer glory. For the sake of argument, or piling up the agony, we will further assume it to be Sunday, when a special peace broods over the country. All the sights and sounds which he loves combine to soothe and please him; he feels at peace with the world, and, possibly unconsciously, is finding sermons in stones and good in everything. Suddenly the raucous note of a motor-horn falls upon his ear, and brings him back to earth with most unpleasing celerity, as a hideous locomotive—for the beautiful motor-car is still in the womb of the future—comes humming and buzzing towards him. The pedestrian involuntarily, or, if the

road be narrow, necessarily, seeks the shelter of the hedge, and next moment the car hurtles past him at the rate of an ordinary passenger-train, viz. from twenty to thirty miles an hour. As far as can be seen for its accompanying dust, it is guided by a man dressed like the steward of a Channel steamer, wearing in addition huge goggles and a false nose, while such of its occupants as chance to be females are swathed in veils and hoods to a most unbecoming degree. As the car passes it raises a cloud of dense, heavy, choking, dust, and leaves behind it a stench as of ten thousand expiring paraffin lamps.

The incident is over in a moment, and the car is quickly out of sight, though the dust and smell long remain as arch offences to eye and nose, but the whole thing, the hurrying, throbbing, piece of mechanism and its *opéra-bouffe* looking driver, is so utterly incongruous with any idea of rural tranquillity, as to effectually destroy our countryman's enjoyment of his surroundings; and he returns home with the feeling of a *gourmet*, who, sitting down to enjoy some favourite dish, is robbed of appetite by finding the corpse of a cockroach in it. In answer to this it will probably be urged that the owner of the motor-car has as much right as our contemplative pedestrian to enjoy the sights and sounds of the country; that the latter is no better than a churlish egotist, and that sentimental or æsthetic considerations have no bearing on matters affecting the public weal. The first objection is unanswerable; but the pedestrian's enjoyment is not obtained at the expense of others; while as regards the second, I would point out that motor-cars are mere

articles of luxury which only conduce to the comfort or amusement of a few thousands of the inhabitants of our densely-crowded islands.

However, I suppose that, as in every other vexed question, matters will right themselves, and that the motorist lion will eventually lie down with the horse-owning lamb, but at present a fine mutual antipathy exists between them, accentuated as regards the latter by the prospect next year of a twenty-mile speed limit.

Sept. 2nd.—To Brewster Sessions, where a full Bench of Magistrates assembled. All the three *ex officio* justices, with whom recent Conservative—save the mark—legislation has thought fit to leaven the too aristocratic tendencies of County Benches, turned up; an event of rare occurrence, no doubt due to the business obligations of these gentlemen, one of whom is a greengrocer, another an undertaker, and the third a chemist. But, on the rare occasions when they can find time to attend to their magisterial duties, I notice that, so far from tempering justice with mercy, and thereby setting an example to the cruel squires under whose iniquitous rule rustic malefactors have languished so long, they invariably urge the infliction of the fullest penalty of the law, and to-day proved no exception to the rule. Personally, I should like to close half the public-houses in England—with reasonable compensation to their owners—nor am I in favour of granting new licenses without the very strongest reason for doing so; but the animus which these three gentlemen imported into to-day's proceedings

perfectly astonished me. Their creed appeared to be that temperance as opposed to teetotalism is impossible; that no publican can possibly be anything but a sinner; and that the working-classes of this country are incapable of any self-restraint where strong liquor is concerned. Consequently, when the Bench adjourned for lunch to the nearest hotel, I fully expected that such ardent reformers would refuse to even cross the threshold of so iniquitous a place as a licensed house; but when I saw the greengrocer and the undertaker wash down their food with ale, while the more epicurean chemist, with an audacity tempered by discretion, partook of what he called a "small port," I could only marvel at

". . . the rarity
Of Christian charity
Under the sun."

Sept. 5th.—It has been a piping hot day, and I have been out shooting, and had a great deal of walking for very meagre results. How much more fatiguing partridge-shooting is than grouse-shooting! To wade up and down a flat field of turnips, or, worse still, of potatoes, tries one far more than thrice the same distance up a steep, heather-covered hill. What giants our grandfathers must have been, who used to go out shooting in weather like this, arrayed in frock-coats, tall, "bell-toppered" hats, and leggings reaching half-way up the thigh! Only last week a friend showed me a curious old portrait of the Sir Harry Goodricke who was a Master of the Quorn in the early part of the last century,

and the object of Dick Christian's special veneration. He was depicted out deer-stalking, admiring a fine stag he had just killed, and this—try to imagine it, ye flannel-shirted, knicker-bockered sportsmen of to-day—was his stalking costume. A voluminous “twice-round” satin cravat with high, pointed “gills,” an exceedingly close-fitting swallow-tailed coat, something like the coats upper boys at Harrow wear, or used to wear, and skin-tight trousers with a broad stripe down the side, closely strapped under Wellington boots. The only sensible part of his dress was a flat Lowland bonnet. Yet this man was one of the most renowned sportsmen of his day, equally famous for his endurance in the saddle or on foot, but how he ever contrived to get up a Highland hill in those scanty trousers passes my comprehension.

Sept. 10th.—I rose early this morning, and by special permission went cub-hunting on Belinda's pony. Hounds met about three miles from here at the Punchbowl, a great hollow in the side of the downs, full of straggling thorns and juniper, and admirably adapted by situation both for blooding the young entry, and for enabling the field to view the operations from the high ground surrounding it.

Distasteful as early rising is to me, I equally recognise that there is no pleasanter hour for riding than before breakfast, and I only wish that I had sufficient resolution to do so every morning, or that, like the companion with whom I presently foregathered, my business in life com-

peled me to such a healthful proceeding. For trotting quietly along, rejoicing in the freshness of the morning air, I overtook my friend and neighbour, Mr. Hardcastle, a farmer of advanced years, mounted on a stout grey mare, whose appearance gave unmistakable indication of her intention to increase the equine population of the country at no distant date. Old Hardcastle was bent on hunting as well as myself, and as we jogged amicably along I expressed my pleasure at seeing him able to enjoy the sport at his time of life—he must be nearly seventy-five—and received an answer which delighted me beyond measure.

“Well, sir,” he modestly replied, “you see I be getten’ a very old man, and the mare’s none so spry as she was; and neither on us be any good for reglar huntin’, but we can still see a bit of sport at a place like the Punchbowl, and I do rarely love to see a fox found and killed.”

Hardcastle is a type of farmer now almost extinct; he has been all his life on the same farm, in the tenancy of which he succeeded his father, and, I believe, his grandfather; and there exists a feeling of mutual respect between him and his landlord as rare as it is admirable. He would scorn to touch a head of game—he does not even avail himself of the Ground Game Act—or harm a fox, and I verily believe would go out of his mind with shame were he in arrear with his rent. His farming is not of the ultra-scientific order, but based on the sound principles of keeping his land clean and heavily manured, while he is a great advocate of what he terms “muck,”

as opposed to artificial fertilisers. "A mahn as pütts muck on his land," he pithily observes, "knows what he be dealin' with, but what they guanies and phosphutts be made on, Lord only knows."

He is a churchman and a churchwarden, and regularly votes "Blue" at election time, not from any particular political bias, but because he has always been accustomed to do so, and from force of habit would probably continue the practice if the party colours of the county were suddenly reversed.¹ He is not a man of much education, nor of conspicuous intellectual ability, but he is universally respected by rich and poor alike, and would as soon think of taking a liberty with his social superiors as of allowing them to do so with him. Would that all farmers were like unto him!

We had a pleasant ride together:

"And talked old matters over . . ."

Then touched upon the game, how scarce it was
This season; glancing thence, discussed the farm,
The fourfold system and the price of grain;"

but although we "struck upon the corn-laws" we did not split upon them, being, on the contrary, very much of a mind concerning them.

Hounds were already at work by the time we reached

¹ Such a case once came actually within my personal experience. A labouring man removed from some distant part of England, where the Radical colour is blue, to this neighbourhood, where it is the emblem of Conservatism. Although a sturdy follower of Mr. Gladstone, he persisted, despite the warnings and entreaties of the Liberal agent, in voting "Blue" at the next general election, on the grounds that he had always done so, and wasn't going to change colours at his time of life!

the Punchbowl, and I spent a pleasant hour cantering round its grassy brim, or “blowing the cool tobacco cloud, and watching the white wreaths pass,” with such of my friends and acquaintances as had been tempted from their beds by the beauty of the morning. It was certainly pleasant to see hounds again and listen to their music, while the mere sight of the faded pink of the hunt-servants’ last year’s coats stirred one’s imagination, but except from the master’s, or huntsman’s, point of view there is not much sport about this early hunting, and after seeing a cub done to death I was not sorry to turn for home, where I consumed a second breakfast with unrivalled appetite.

Sept. 11th.—Why is the scenery of England so entirely dissimilar to that of other European countries? I have seen parts of France that might have been Germany; parts of Italy that might have been France; parts of Austria that might have been Switzerland; and parts of Norway that might have been America; but I have never yet come across a bit of English scenery that by any stretch of imagination could have belonged to another country. This struck me particularly to-day, when, after laboriously wheeling my bicycle up Gallows Hill, I stopped on its crest, after the custom of the middle-aged, to admire the view. There is nothing specially magnificent about this beyond the fact that it is very extensive; and its counterpart can be found a score of times in every county in England; yet seen in the quivering heat of a glowing autumn afternoon,

it possessed a beauty not to be found elsewhere than in our islands. The vast expanse of gently undulating country, chequered with long lines of hedgerow timber, and golden with new-shorn stubbles, or ripe corn falling before the reaping-machines, whose whirring, chastened by distance, fell not unpleasantly on the ear; the pale green of the pastures and the darker tints of the root crops; the farms and villages clustering round their church spires; the dark masses of woods, and the dusty roads winding like white ribbon through the quiet country; overhead a sky of brazen blue, yet the distances fading into the gentle haze which is another special attribute of English landscape, all combined to make a picture as restful to the mind as it was beautiful to the eye.

Sept. 15th.—“Never to prophesy unless you know” is an excellent though too frequently disregarded maxim; but I can hardly imagine a more galling situation than for the man who really *does* know, to endeavour to instruct a sceptical audience, and receive unmerited ridicule for his pains. This is unfortunately the too common fate of the well-informed, and yesterday we had an amusing instance of it. We were at a croquet party at the M.’s, and were having afternoon tea on the lawn, when we were all startled by a sudden moaning roar, which was repeated several times, and the noise of which seemed to fill the whole country-side. Speculation at once arose as to its origin. Except Mrs. M., who stoutly maintained—goodness knows why!—it was

the result of an earthquake, we all agreed it was caused by some animal, but opinions differed very much as to what beast could give vent to such a blood-curdling noise. One said it was a donkey, another a sheep (!), I stuck out for a bull, but finally it was agreed it must be a cow which had got itself into difficulties, stuck fast in a quagmire or a hedgerow. Then uprose the voice of C., a mighty hunter of big game, who, being habitually a man of few words, had hitherto taken no part in the discussion. "The animal that made that noise," he said quietly, "was a lion."

This being obviously impossible, we all with one accord waxed merry at C.'s expense, and pointed many shafts of delicate humour at him. M. offered to lend him a rifle for self-protection on his way home; his wife announced her intention of lighting fires round their house during the night to scare the wild beast away; Jack proposed to tie up a goat at the nearest watering-place, and sit up over it after the manner of African hunters—in fine, we were all exceedingly witty, or thought ourselves so, but C., *justus et tenax propositi*, steadfastly adhered to his statement, and to-day I have found out he was perfectly right. Somebody's "world-renowned" menagerie was passing along the road near to M.'s house on its way to X. fair, and it *was* the voice of the king of beasts clamouring for his supper that had disturbed our tea-party. *Rit bien, qui rira le dernier.*

Sept. 18th.—A deplorable coolness has arisen between two former friends, our vicar and the parish doctor;

the outcome of the former's lamentable habit of gentle sarcasm. It has happened in this wise. The vicar and I were just starting for an afternoon's shooting over his glebe, when the doctor drove past in his gig. He is one of those well-meaning people who always deem it necessary to greet you with what they consider a happy truism, and as he passed us he waved his hand and called out cheerily: "Off to kill something, I see." To such a remark, coming from such a quarter, there could only be one answer, and the vicar could not resist making it. "Yes," he replied equally cheerily, "I hope you're not;" and the good medico, who is a Scotchman, has taken dire umbrage at the pleasantry.

It has put me in mind of a charming anecdote I came across some time ago of a village doctor who, living to a green old age, was finally buried in the very centre of the churchyard where he had previously seen so many of his patients laid to rest. He had been so universally popular in life that his many friends subscribed to erect a handsome memorial over his remains, and, the question arising as to what should be engraved thereon, a humorist, whose wit could have been his only excuse for his irreverence, suggested, "*Si monumentum requiris circumspice!*"

Sept. 20th.—One curious fact about partridge-shooting which never fails to strike me every year is, how some particular covey, usually a very large one, manages to escape scathless to the end of the season. So invariably

is this the case on every shooting with which I have ever been acquainted, that I come to the conclusion that it is not the result of chance, but of atavism, and that the covey is the offspring of some peculiarly intelligent mother, from whom it derives an instinctive perception of the range of modern fowling-pieces. This year there is such a covey of fourteen on the glebe shooting, easily recognisable by its containing one very light, almost buff-coloured bird, which has hitherto successfully defied every effort of the vicar or myself to get within shot of it, and which will inevitably remain unbroken until the end of the season.

The accuracy with which these birds divine one's intention towards them is extraordinary; this afternoon, having nothing in my hand but an umbrella, they allowed me to walk right in among them in a bare pasture-field; yet only last week when the vicar and I were out shooting, they rose two hundred yards away the moment we entered the thirty-acre field of turnips in which they happened to be. Such behaviour induces a feeling of violent personal animosity on my part towards these partridges, and I frankly confess that, given opportunity, I would cheerfully shoot them sitting. I can see that their lawful owner shares this sentiment, though, in view of his cloth, I do not think he would stoop to such ignoble extremes as myself, but talks of circumventing the covey by driving it, a proceeding which he secretly recognises as well as I do, will be perfectly futile.

Not all the able-bodied men in the parish would be

able to drive such birds as these in a direction where they scented danger.

Sept. 27th.—Belinda and I have just returned from visiting at two country-houses of widely different character. On Tuesday we went for a couple of nights to Wapshot Park, the seat of Sir Giles Wapshot, Bart.—I trust I may be forgiven the piracy of this name—a gloomy-looking edifice erected in the reign of Queen Anne, to which monarch the first Baronet was physician. We arrived in time for five o'clock tea, which Lady Wapshot and her daughters were dispensing to the rest of the party; a couple of elderly squires and their wives, and a diffident but eligible young man, on whom, I thought, Miss Emily Wapshot is not disposed to look unkindly. Sir Giles was not present; he disdains five o'clock tea, and invariably retires about this hour to the apartment which, by a fine stretch of imagination, he calls his study, to fortify himself against the fatigues of dinner by a little refreshing slumber over the *Times*.

The first hour or two after arrival in a strange country-house is apt to be rather a cheerless time, and to-day proved no exception to the rule. Lady Wapshot is a charming old lady, and her daughters are nice, unaffected girls, but they have not the gift of setting strangers at their ease; and it was with a general feeling of relief that we dispersed to our rooms to dress for dinner, a meal which is served at Wapshot Park at 7·30 from May to October, and at 7 for the rest

of the year. Belinda and I occupied an enormous vault-like bedroom and dressing-room *en suite*, the furniture of which must surely date from the sovereign who enriched the Wapshot arms with a bloody hand. The bed in particular excited both admiration and apprehension: a four-poster of solid, shining mahogany, its patchwork counterpane lay at least five feet above the floor; while the quantity of curtains and trappings of dingy brocade with which it was hung so affected Belinda's nervous system, that before retiring to rest that night she insisted on my searching them to make sure that neither burglar nor bogey lurked within their ample folds.

The party at dinner was further augmented by some country neighbours, including the Rector of Wapshot and his wife, the latter being the lady who fell to my unworthy lot to take in to dinner, where her conversation during the repast dealt exclusively with the shortcomings of servants, at whose hands she appeared to have been an almost incredible sufferer. The meal, which was of the character usually supplied by a "good, plain cook with a kitchen-maid under her," erred rather on the side of abundance, and was, I imagine, largely supplied from the Wapshot estate. I know this was the case with the saddle of mutton which formed its *pièce de résistance*, for Sir Giles told us so, expatiating with pardonable pride on its excellence. Indeed, the worthy baronet could probably conceive no higher recommendation for anything than that it was produced on his property; his simple creed of merit being that England is the finest

country in the world; X.-shire the finest county in England, and Wapshot the most desirable spot in X.-shire. Consequently, he never leaves home, save once a year, when, the hay harvest being assured, he conducts his family to London, where they spend a fortnight—no more, no less, in a gloomy hotel near Cavendish Square. During this time Lady Wapshot and the young ladies leave cards on such of the territorial magnates of their county as pass the season in London, and visit the Academy, the Botanical Gardens, and similar places of innocent recreation; while Sir Giles passes most of his spare time in peaceful slumber on a sofa at the Carlton—the club of that name, not the restaurant, *bien entendu*.

After the ladies had left us, our host, who likes the sound of his own voice, pointed out the only possible solution of the fiscal problem, meanwhile manfully taking his share in the consumption of a couple of bottles of excellent, if rather potent, port wine. I am not a great post-prandial wine-bibber, and I would cheerfully have paid five shillings to be allowed to smoke one little cigarette; but there are limits to human audacity, and to propose to desecrate the dining-room of Wapshot Park with tobacco smoke exceeds them; so I possessed my soul in what patience I could while we adjourned to the drawing-room, where first the rector's daughters, and then the Misses Wapshot favoured us with a selection of music, both vocal and instrumental. This was followed by a round game for counters at twopence a dozen, at the conclusion of which such guests as were not staying

in the house took their departure, all, I noticed, as they shook hands with their hostess, murmuring something about "a delightful evening." At last, thought I, the moment has arrived when I shall be able to say two words to a cigar, but in this I was—literally—reckoning without my host. A move was made indeed, but to the entrance hall and not to the smoking-room; and as we entered by one door, a long line of servants, beginning with a dignified, black-silk-clad housekeeper and ending with a giggling scullery-maid, filed in at another and took their seats on two long wooden benches: Sir Giles put on his spectacles and clutched a ponderous volume of *Family Prayer*, and the rest of us sought the nearest article of furniture whereat to kneel. After our host had concluded a most comprehensive appeal for the welfare of mankind, the ladies bade us good-night, and we smokers were invited to repair to the gun-room, a comfortless apartment furnished with very straight-backed wooden chairs, and whose stone-flagged floor struck chill through the cocoa-nut matting with which it was carpeted. Late hours are not in vogue at Wapshot, and when Sir Giles had finished a very small, mild, cigar, which he smoked impaled on a pen-knife, he invited us to partake of "some spirits and water," and proposed an adjournment to bed at the temperate hour of 11 p.m.

It is the custom to herald the morn at Wapshot Park by the ringing of a huge bell on the top of the stables; visitors are called at 7.30, and family prayers and breakfast follow an hour later. I confess with shame that these hours are rather more matutinal than is altogether

agreeable to me, and the unwarrantable time I took to lace my boots prevented my attendance at the earlier function, but I did most ample justice to the second, especially in view of the fact that one of my many vices, that of drinking tea before rising, is not in favour in Sir Giles's establishment.

Immediately after breakfast we went out shooting. Sir Giles no longer shoots himself, so the management of the day's proceedings was entrusted to his *fidus Achates*, the rector of the parish, an indefatigable man, who wore the heaviest boots I have ever seen off a ploughman's feet. Under his energetic guidance we tramped the fields till dewy eve, with only one short respite in the middle of the day, when we consumed Brobdingnagian sandwiches and bread and cheese, washed down with flat luke-warm beer out of a stone jar and insipid whisky and water, under the shelter of a haystack. For shooting is an amusement very seriously regarded at Wapshot, and by no one more so than the reverend gentleman who directed operations that day. He was a capital, if slightly jealous shot, but his chief characteristic lay in his determination to leave no stone unturned, no field unwalked, no hedgerow unbeaten, in his pursuit of game. As a rule, one does not seek partridges in grass fields during the heat of the morning, nor in turnips late in the afternoon, but the worthy padre insisted on our beating every field as it came with mathematical accuracy. Once, when I hinted that, having driven two coveys into a field of potatoes, it was hardly necessary to walk a bare pasture full of stock lying next

to them, he replied, “Ah! but I’ve often known a hare to lie in that field.” The absurdity of a line of guns and beaters marching and wheeling over forty acres on the chance of bagging one hare did not suggest itself to him, and the whole of the day’s proceedings being conducted on similar lines I was not altogether sorry when we suspended operations. Not that we had a bad day’s sport; game was abundant, but had matters been managed on less conservative principles we should probably have nearly doubled our bag. From Belinda I learnt on our return that the ladies of the party had spent the day in doing fancy needlework, varied by gentle exercise in the gardens, and a solemn drive in an ark-like landau.

Next day we left Wapshot to spend two nights at Lacklands Abbey, the seat—let me once more go to Thackeray for inspiration—of Hermann Newcome, Esq., who has recently become a landowner in the county. Well do I remember the uproar among the squires when it became known that Lord Lackland had sold the abbey to Mr. Newcome, who is one of those multi-millionaires that have descended meteor-like on English society within the last few years; and the most derogatory reports were circulated as to his character, reputation, and extraction, some specially well-informed people even going so far as to assert that his patronymic should be spelt Neukomm, and that the Judengasse of Frankfort-on-the-Main claimed the honour of his birth. Be this as it may, the X.-shire folk were most unnecessarily perturbed over his advent among them, and Mr. Claypath

of Beanacres, whose grandfather—he had one!—plied a weaver's shuttle at Bolton, declared that he should not allow Mrs. Claypath to call at Lacklands. But to the dire confusion of Mr. Claypath and his fellow-sufferers it presently became forced on their intelligence that it was a matter of perfect indifference to the new owner of the Abbey whether they called on him or not. For, in addition to Lacklands, Mr. Newcome is also the possessor of a house in Grosvenor Square,—where Great Personages honour him with their company—of a villa at Newmarket, and of one of the largest steam yachts afloat; so that it is needless to point out that the fortunate possessor of such claims on the esteem of his fellow-creatures is independent of association with such small fry as the lesser order of country gentry. Indeed, it was a matter of considerable astonishment to me that Belinda and I should have been bidden to a house of such social pretensions as Lacklands, with the master of which I have but a very slight acquaintance.

We only reached our destination in time to dress for dinner at 8·30 p.m., and on descending to the drawing-room found a large party of beautifully-dressed guests already assembled, all of whom, in contradiction to our unworthy selves, either merited, or aspired to, the much-coveted distinction of "smartness." What struck one most about them was that none of them seemed to possess any surnames: they were all Algys and Billys, and Lady Algys and Mrs. Billys. I presume this is the customary method of address within the charmed circle

of smart society, but it is a little embarrassing to the humble individual who finds himself temporarily pitchforked into it; and I own that it was with considerable misgiving as to my ability to entertain so fine a lady that I presently conducted a Mrs. Jacky Somebody to the dinner-table. But my apprehensions were groundless. A short but searching examination satisfied my new acquaintance before she had finished her fish that I could lay no claim to smartness, and that therefore the barest meed of civility was all I could expect from those happily endowed with such qualifications. Consequently, she met my well-meant efforts at small-talk with the indifference they undoubtedly merited, and devoted herself to a pink and white young gentleman in a high collar, who sat on her other side, leaving me to find ample occupation in the contemplation of my fellow-guests, and the consumption of a most excellent dinner; a situation I accepted with philosophical relief. The splendour of the ladies' dresses, and the magnificence of the hot-house flowers and the gold centrepieces which covered the table,—all such vessels were of gold, none were of silver, which is not anything accounted of in the house of Newcome—the bewildering variety of dishes and the giants with powdered heads who proffered them; the high-pitched conversation and the shrill screams of laughter as some more than ordinarily facetious Algy set the table in a roar, all afforded me ample subject for contemplation and reflection, and presented a marked contrast to the simple fare and solemn decorum of

Wapshot Park, where the whole company sat silent while Sir Giles delivered himself of some ponderous version of "Old Grouse in the Gun-room."

It was nearly eleven o'clock when we finally left the dining-room, and repaired to a huge apartment known as the music-room, on whose polished floor an impromptu dance was organised. However, the mazy waltz and sprightly polka did not meet the requirements of Mr. Newcome's guests, so a set of aptly-named "Kitchen Lancers" was improvised, the performance of which vaguely recalled to me the zinc palms and gas lamps of a Parisian place of amusement I had not visited since the days of my youth. But dancing was soon voted "slow"—a most inapposite definition as it seemed to me—so a move was proposed to the smoking-room, where the party presently reassembled in tea-gowns and smoking-suits of marvellous design and brilliancy. The ladies lighted cigarettes, and the gentlemen regalias, and the night being yet young—it was only about 12:30 A.M.—a roulette table was brought in, a large box of ivory counters produced, a banker selected, and—I, in company with one or two others who had played this fascinating game during the Consulship of Plancus and lost our taste for it, judged it prudent to retire to bed. It must have been considerably later that the rest of the party sought their couches, as I was roused from slumber in the small hours of the morning by a most fearful uproar in the corridor outside my bedroom: the tramp of hurrying feet and the swish of skirts, bumpings as of reluctant bodies being dragged

along the floor, yells of laughter and feminine shrieks, cries of "Go it, Billy!" "Sit on his head!" "Pour it down his back, Lady Algy!" and so forth, plainly indicating that a most spirited bear-fight was concluding the evening's festivities.

A plenteous repast of tea, fancy bread, and hot-house fruit, is supplied to visitors at Lacklands in their bed-rooms, and a more solid breakfast follows at 10 A.M., partaken of by Mr. Newcome's smart friends with almost incredible appetite. I had seen them indulge in a most lavish dinner the night before; I gathered that supper had been provided for the roulette players before they retired to rest; all had already broken their fasts that morning, and yet they now ate with a heartiness that excited my astonishment no less than my admiration.

Breakfast over, I fondly imagined that we should at once proceed with the partridge-driving which was the object of our visit, but an hour was wasted—as far as the rest of us were concerned at least—while our host communicated with the various Bourses of Europe, and a start was not made until nearly mid-day. Mr. Newcome does not understand much about sport himself, but he has plenty of friendly advisers who know what they want, and see that they get it; and consequently his shooting is conducted on a scale of luxuriant magnificence. No time was wasted here in tramping about the country. A huge motor-car—Mr. Newcome is a great supporter of the automobile—took us straight to the scene of the first drive, where a stupendous array of loaders and keepers was awaiting us. We had hardly taken our

places before birds began to come over us thick and fast, and under ordinary conditions we ought to have had a capital morning's sport. But roulette, champagne, and bear-fighting up to 2 A.M., tend to improve neither the accuracy, nor the steadiness, of eye and hand, and although there were shoals of birds—the famous natural resources of the Lacklands partridge-shooting are augmented every year by a thousand hand-reared birds—the bag at lunch-time was by no means proportionate to the expenditure of cartridges.

Luncheon, graced by the presence of the ladies, was served in a large marquee, where a meal of many hot courses, washed down with magnums of champagne—this noble wine is never served in lesser vessels at Mr. Newcoine's—and ending with coffee and liqueurs, was consumed with the unfailing appetite I have already commented on. A considerable time was then passed in the enjoyment of tobacco and much high-pitched flirtation, and then, now accompanied by the ladies, we resumed our sport. I trust it is only diffidence and not misogyny, but I detest the presence of women out shooting; and to-day the Mrs. Dicky who attached herself to me during the first drive after lunch, so distracted me by chattering and moving about, that I missed four easy shots in succession, whereupon she remarked she "s'posed I wasn't accustomed to partridge-drivin'!" and borrowing my shooting-seat and a cigarette, moved off, to my inexpressible relief, in search of a more expert marksman. I am bound to admit that the shooting, or rather hitting, improved very

much during the afternoon, the result, I fancy, of the recuperative properties of the champagne and old brandy at lunch; but about five o'clock, when the coveys were nicely broken up, and sport was almost at its best, exhausted nature required further support, and we were "motored" back to the Abbey to partake of yet another meal of hot cakes, savoury sandwiches, and poached eggs. As soon as this was swallowed the card-tables were set out, and unintermittent Bridge filled up the interval till dinner, which in turn was followed by more Bridge, more roulette, and, I believe, more supper, as a fitting *finale* to the day's amusement.

The party broke up next day, and, as far as I was concerned, I left Lacklands Abbey without much regret. I would certainly have liked another day's partridge-driving, but the sense of being at forced high pressure from morning till night, and the constant straining after excitement and amusement, coupled with the fact that nature has denied me a "smart" digestion, had an effect rather depressing than otherwise on my bucolic nerves, and I feel temporarily of the opinion of the cynic who laid down the axiom that life would be endurable but for its pleasures.

Sept. 29th.—Until recently I had been under the impression that the amazing capacity of fine, or rich, people for the absorption of huge quantities of food, which so impressed me at Lacklands last week, was, like

Mr. Newcome himself, a thing of entirely modern production, but I now find I am mistaken. I have just been shown an extract from the household accounts of a "Lady of Quality," who lived nearly two hundred years ago, and this is the bill of fare she offered to "Lord C. and his Ladies," when they honoured her with their company at dinner: "Soup, roast mutton, orange pudding, calf's head, boiled ham and chickens, collops for a change dish, five young turkeys, peas, fry, tarts, fried-fish, artichokes, two tongues, stewed green apricots, strawberries, currants, cold possets, cherries, cream, and cream-cheese."

I wonder if these delicacies were consumed in the order named; is it possible that a digestion could ever have existed which could cope with calf's head as a sequel to orange pudding, and fried-fish on the top of tarts? Presumably, however, the dishes were all placed on the table at once, and Lord C. and his Ladies flitted from one to the other as inclination suggested.

Similarly, Belinda, who has a lamentable partiality for books dealing with "high life," has lately been perusing "The Letters of Wilhelmina, Marchioness of Carabas"—this is near enough to the real title of the book—which I picked up, *faute de mieux*, after lunch to-day. I found it insufferably dull, but I chanced on the account of a meal provided for the Marchioness and her husband on their arrival at a relative's house in the year 1810, and which I reproduce verbatim.

"We fared sumptuously at the rich man's table.

The dinner for *us two*—the italics are mine—was soup, fish, fricassee of chicken, cutlets, venison, veal, hare, vegetables of all kinds, tart, melon, pine-apple, grapes, peaches, nectarines, with wine in proportion. Before this sumptuous repast was well digested, about four hours later, the doors opened, and in was pushed a supper in the same proportion, in itself enough to have fed me for a week. I did not know whether to laugh or to cry. Either would have been better than what I did, which was to begin again, with the prospect of a pill to-night, and redoubled abstemiousness for a week to come."

Here, it is true, the Marchioness raises a protest against such gourmandising, and even points out its pains and penalties in no ambiguous language, but the passage shows the habits of society a hundred years ago; and after seeing a "Mrs. Charlie" consume *inter alia*—many *alia*—three platefuls of devilled ham at lunch, I have come to the conclusion that the mantle of the great people of that period has descended upon the smart ones of to-day.

Nor is the propensity for over-eating confined to this admirable class alone; it apparently affects all who are brought into contact with it. Belinda deemed it beneath her dignity to visit at Lacklands unattended, and consequently Mary, the housemaid, was promoted to be acting lady's-maid. In virtue of this brevet rank she obtained the freedom of what, I believe, is termed "the room," where she made such good use of her

opportunity as to have been incapacitated for work since her return home by a severe bilious attack.

Nor is this a matter of surprise, when I learn that even so simple a meal as five o'clock tea is not served in the Lacklands "room" without cold chicken and ham, and poached eggs on anchovy toast!

O C T O B E R

Oct. 2nd.—Young Brown dined here last night, full of the glories of Switzerland, where he has been spending the last two months with an Oxford reading party. He told us rather an interesting experience of what he termed a “bit of luck,” but which, I venture to think, is more remarkable as an object-lesson in dogged perseverance. When staying at some out-of-the-way *pension* in the Bernese Oberland, he and a friend decided to go off by themselves on a two days’ walking tour. Just as they were starting, they remembered that neither of them possessed a watch that was in working order—a not uncommon state of affairs with undergraduates’ timepieces—but a fellow-guest in the hotel, a good-natured American gentleman, volunteered to lend them his watch, stipulating, however, they should take great care of it, as it was a family heirloom. Very foolishly, in view of its value, they accepted its loan; and spent two days scrambling among the lower Alps without a guide, sleeping in a hay *châlet*, and doing their best, no doubt, after the manner of young England, to break their necks. They got back to their hotel late on the second night, when every other inmate of it had retired to bed, and were preparing to do the same, when they found they had lost the borrowed

watch! Their consternation is best described in Master Brown's own words—"a blue funk"—and an agonised council as to their best course resulted in the determination to immediately repeat their little tour, not only retracing their footsteps, but imitating to the best of their recollection all their actions of the previous two days. No one in the *pension*, save the sleepy *portier* who had admitted them, knew of their return, and him they swore to secrecy, ere, weary and despondent, they set out anew at daybreak on the following morning.

For two miserable days they followed their former line of march, sleeping at the same *châlet*, and eagerly questioning in Stratford-atte-Bow French every native of the German Canton they encountered, naturally without useful result. Late on the afternoon of the second day they came to a stream where they had bathed on their previous excursion, and, faithful to their determination, proceeded to repeat the performance; "not that we wanted to, a bit, for it was beastly cold, and beginning to rain." On the occasion of his former dip, Brown had placed his clothes under a particular pine-tree, and going to lay them there again, found the missing watch lying under an overhanging rock, none the worse for its two nights in the open air!

They got back to their *pension* the same evening, explaining their prolonged absence by an extension of their walk, and to this day the kind American does not know how near he had been to the loss of his cherished watch.

After dinner our conversation turned on the nomen-

clature of places and houses. G. told us that Mr. T., the dentist at X., has just built himself a very hideous red-brick villa, and christened it "The Poplars," with the inevitable result that it is universally known as "The Molars!"

Oct. 10th.—In company with, I suppose, about three-fourths of my fellow-creatures, I labour under the thankless burden of being a trustee of other people's money; and were I only the actual possessor of those comfortable sums in Consols and Railway Debentures that stand in my name, Quarter Day would be robbed of most of its present terrors. Still, ungrateful as the office of trustee usually is, in my case the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb, by the fact that Jack, who is my co-trustee of Millicent's marriage-settlement, is the owner of a grouse-moor and a salmon-river. Consequently, whenever occasion arises for an interchange of views respecting our stewardship, I never fail to point out that a personal interview, where the matter can be settled in five minutes, is vastly preferable to a tedious and profitless correspondence, and, being always ready, whatever Belinda may say to the contrary, to sacrifice myself to the convenience of others, cheerfully undertake a long journey to the North of England. I thus not only savour the rare pleasure of a good action; in itself, we are taught, a sufficient recompense; but also reap the advantage of some excellent sport at Jack's expense, thereby confuting the cynical dictum that unselfishness goes unrewarded in this world. Thus it came about

that, having some trifling matters of business to discuss, I travelled uncomplainingly down to Northumberland last week. Not indeed that a railway journey has ever any great terrors for me: given a fast train, a compartment to myself, a well-filled luncheon-basket, and plenty of amusing literature, I thoroughly enjoy speeding through a new country at fifty miles an hour. One fact, however, never fails to impress me when travelling North, and that is the change in the atmosphere once one has passed the Trent. No matter how oppressive the heat, how glowing the sunshine, one has left behind in the South, as one gets near Retford or Doncaster, the air grows perceptibly cooler, the vegetation becomes less luxuriant, a dull grey pall covers the sky, and a sort of chill seems to come over the face of nature, which usually produces a slight depression of spirits on a sun-worshipper like myself. I suppose it is due to their climatic surroundings that we must ascribe the "dourness" and hard-headedness of northerners, but much as I should like to possess some of this latter excellent attribute, I confess it would be dearly bought by existence in a climate where the thermometer rarely rises above 60°.

I had a pleasant time at Jack's, who is the owner of one of those luxurious bachelor residences more often imagined than encountered. An old Border tower has been converted into an exceedingly comfortable modern residence without detracting from its external appearance, which is in admirable keeping with its surroundings. An excellent cook, and cellar to correspond, add to its

internal attractions, and a delightful grey-stone-walled garden, where old-fashioned perennial flowers grow side by side with fruit and vegetables, slopes sunnily down to the rushing river, which, although I do not think he ever saw it, and certainly never fished it, has been as perfectly and as beautifully described by Charles Kingsley, as though he had been born on its banks. "It was such a stream as you see in dear old Bewick . . . a full hundred yards wide, sliding on from broad pool to broad shallow, and broad shallow to broad pool, over great fields of shingle, under oak and ash coverts, past low cliffs of sandstone, past green meadows and fair parks, and a great house of grey stone, and brown moors above, and here and there against the sky the smoking chimney of a colliery." Thank goodness there are no collieries within many miles of Jack's fishing, but otherwise the description is perfect; a piece of word-painting, such as it is given to few to imitate, and to none to equal.

From no point of view is autumn salmon-fishing to be compared to the same sport in spring or early summer. However game or heavy an autumn fish may be, it seems to lack the fighting qualities of a spring one; its rusty appearance contrasts poorly with the "purple shot through with a silver ray" of its vernal fellow, and, however beautiful the autumn tints of the country, however bracing the crisp October air, they cannot compare with the soft delicate green and the gentle southerly breezes of spring. None the less, there is an undefinable charm in being by the river-side on a calm autumn day

SLIDING ON FROM BROAD POOL TO BROAD SHALLOW



when all nature seems to be sinking resignedly to rest in the embrace of the dying year, which I tasted to the full last week, and especially so the first morning I went fishing. It was a perfect October day; the meadows lay soaked and glistening with dew, each bush and briar was covered with gossamer lace-work, and a thin white mist of morning was being fast sucked up by the warm autumn sun, as I reached the pool where I intended to begin my sport. At its head was a gut of water-worn boulders, through which the brown-hued river came tumbling and spouting, to spread itself out into little shimmering, dancing, waves and oily runs until its force was spent and it slid into a long sullen stretch of deep black water all covered with streaks and lumps of amber foam, which drifted aimlessly into hidden currents and backwashes, and were again sucked up into the hurly-burly at the head of the pool. At my feet a beach of gradually shelving shingle, but on the opposite side of the river a steep cliff of grey limestone, from whose crevices hung gnarled oaks and ashes and rowans all glorious in scarlet and gold. Save for the delectable music of "laughing water," hardly a sound to be heard: now and then a sheep bleated faintly on the distant moorlands, or the crow of a pheasant came from the larch plantations, and once or twice a salmon heaved itself out of the water with a resounding splash; but I stood for some time by the river-side thinking of many things, perhaps of the "books in the running brooks," and forgot all about my fishing.

I had some fairly good sport, getting three grilse and two fish in three short days, all killed by fair wading and casting, and gaffed and landed unaided. The heaviest fish was 18 lbs., and I killed it by a rather uncommon bit of good luck. Early in the day I noticed it constantly plunging and rolling behind a particular rock, and with some difficulty, for it was a long cast, managed to get a Butcher over it. It fastened at once, and actually made my reel revolve, but I suppose I was nervous and struck too hard, for the fly came away immediately, and cursing myself for a heavy-handed bungler, I naturally concluded I had seen the last of that salmon. However, late in the afternoon, coming back to the pool I found the fish still plunging behind the same rock, and tried in vain to tempt it with a Jock Scott. As, however, it still continued to show itself at intervals, I rested it for a few minutes, and changing my fly for the Butcher I had used in the morning, cast once more over the fish, which came at once, and well-hooked this time, was eventually killed : a piece of rare good fortune. The question has since arisen in my mind as to whether the incident points to shortness of memory on the part of the salmon or not? It certainly remembered the particular fly which had tempted it in the morning, but, on the other hand, it had equally forgotten the smart which the attractive insect must have caused. I suppose it was a case of *omne ignotum pro magnifico.*

I also dropped in for a couple of days' grouse-driving ; both rather typical of that most fickle form of shooting. The first was one of those days on which none but a fool

or an Englishman would be abroad for his pleasure, which we certainly took sadly enough. A marrow-piercing gale blew from the north-east; a soaking rain began to fall as we entered our butts for the first drive, and continued without intermission all day; such grouse as came forward were blown over us in huge packs, and could not be induced to face the wind for a return drive; the wet and the cold penetrated the thickest macintoshes and the stoutest boots; Mark Tapley himself could not have even simulated enjoyment in such circumstances. We bore it till lunch-time, when, after a futile attempt to eat lukewarm Irish stew and sodden sandwiches under the lee of a stone wall, we unanimously agreed to give over shooting for the day, and fled home before the gale to dry clothes and a warm fire.

The keepers and drivers alone appeared unmoved by the weather—I suppose from the familiarity which breeds contempt. Many of them, I was told, would have to walk seven or eight miles through the drenching storm before they reached home; yet the great long-legged, red-whiskered fellows, most of whom, I was delighted to notice, disdained macintoshes, and wore the old-fashioned shepherds' plaids, started off across the mist-wrapped fells as cheerfully as though it were a fine summer's evening. Indeed, the proletariat of the north of England and Scotland always appear to me indifferent to rain. When I had got in that afternoon and was changing my wet things, I saw from my bedroom window Jack's gardener contentedly grubbing up potatoes *in his shirt-sleeves*, and I thought with bitterness of Thomas at

home, who flies to the shelter of the potting-house before the gentlest of April showers.

I am not the first of my family to be struck by this idiosyncrasy of the inhabitants of the northern portion of our islands. In the year 1792 my great-great-uncle, an adventurous Midland counties Squarson, undertook "A Tour through various Parts of Scotland," and on his happy return from those barbarous regions, presented his experiences of them to the public in a ponderous calf-bound tome bearing the above title. This is not a work I can confidently recommend to lovers of either the sensational, or the humorous, in literature, but one passage in it so exactly coincides with my own views on the point in question, that it tends to increase my belief in the doctrine of heredity, and encourages me to reproduce it here. The worthy gentleman's first stoppage in Scotland was at Moffat, where he arrived on a very rainy evening, and, gazing from the window of his inn upon the market-place of that town, he indulges in the following reflections :—

" We had frequent occasion to admire the unconcerned hardiness of idle spectators, and of persons stopping each other in the market-place, to converse during the heaviest showers of rain. Women too, and some not of the lowest class, without hat or bonnet, we saw in conversations *tête-à-tête*, discoursing with as much earnestness as if perfectly insensible of the weather. These good people, unaffected and unhurt by a humid and inclement atmosphere, and remarkable, I may add too, for bearing with indifference sudden transitions from

heat to cold, enjoy in these respects an enviable advantage over ourselves."

This is exactly the conclusion at which I arrived that afternoon.

The gale blew itself out during the night, and the next day was as fine and cheerful as the previous one had been the reverse. The sun shone warmly from out a bright sky; a gentle breeze replaced the roaring hurricane; the air was clear and bracing, and no finer day for grouse-driving could be desired. The birds too, though heavily packed, drove remarkably well, and the shooting being moderately good, we got forty-three brace, an excellent bag for October, or indeed, with the exception of a few specially-favoured localities, for a Northumbrian moor at any season of the year. It is curious why these Border moors should carry such comparatively small stocks of grouse, for, judging by their appearance, exactly the opposite should be the case. They lie no higher than the Yorkshire moors; they mostly slope to the south; they are well watered and amply covered with excellent heather; and yet a thousand acres of bare-looking fell in Yorkshire will yield a bag five or six times as heavy as the same extent of capital-looking grouse ground in Northumberland.

In one respect, however, the Border moors can claim superiority, and that is in the quantity of black game to be found on them. I was perfectly astonished at the size of a great pack of black cocks—not a grey hen among them—which came over us in the first drive, and fondly hoped they would be brought back in the suc-

ceeding one. But no ; they came forward to a ridge of heather within two hundred yards of the butts, and settled there—"clapped doon" my loader expressed it—running to and fro with their heads up, and eyeing the guns with evident disapproval, until the drivers came on them, when they promptly rose, and, heedless of much shouting and waving of flags, flew straight back, and, I suppose, clean off the moor ; for, although we picked up an odd bird or two during the day, we never saw the big pack again. The flight of a driven black-cock is very deceptive to the eye. It appears to lumber heavily along, and yet I noticed once, when a black-cock and some grouse were flushed at the same moment, that it soon left the latter behind.

At one drive I had for immediate neighbours two sportsmen who admirably illustrated the old and new styles of shooting. On my right was Mr. F., an elderly squire ; on my left his son, an ornament to his Majesty's mounted forces, and their methods of shooting differed as widely as their attire—which is saying a good deal. When old Mr. F. noticed birds coming to him, he crouched low in his butt until they were about a hundred yards off, when he raised his gun to his shoulder, and covered the grouse he had selected, as though aiming with a rifle. I noticed that he kept his left hand just in front of his trigger guard, and, though this is conjecture on my part, have no doubt he closed his left eye. He never fired unless he felt sure of hitting, reserving his fire until the birds were close upon him, and then almost invariably killed one with the first

barrel, and, *when he had time*, often got another with his second. He only used one gun, a hammer one, and indeed, a second would have been of very little use to him.

Now contrast his *modus operandi* with that of the bold dragoon on my left, who, as soon as a bird or birds came within fifty yards of him, flung up his gun with his left hand pushed nearly up to its muzzle, and apparently without aiming, put in four barrels of two hammerless ejectors almost as fast as I could clap my hands. He certainly threw no *chances* away—the less said about *cartridges* the better—for nothing seemed too far off nor too difficult for him to attempt; yet I do not think that at the end of the day he could claim a much heavier score than his aged sire, whose methods he irreverently described as “poking.” Still I am rather of dear old Colonel Hawker’s opinion, who would sooner see a man miss in good style than kill in bad.

On my way home from Jack’s I had to wait a couple of hours in Newcastle, which I spent not unpleasantly in exploration of that grimy, but picturesque, city. There is something about the great industrial towns of the “stone-ribbed North” that is to me at once fascinating yet repellent. I felt it to the full yesterday as the South express clanked away from the reeking city across the soaring High-Level bridge that spans the inky Tyne—by the way, I wonder how many Southerners know that, filthy sewer as it appears here, in its higher reaches it is one of the most beautiful and prolific salmon-rivers in Great Britain?—past miles of sidings, crowded with endless trucks of coal; past rows and rows of mean streets all

exactly alike and all equally hideous; past tall chimneys that belched forth smoke and short ones that vomited flame; past huge metal-roofed sheds ringing with the clank of iron and the whirr of machinery, where gangs of grimy workmen grappled with great masses of molten steel; until one became impressed and awed by the evidence of wealth and power, and thriving, throbbing industry, and felt that it might have been better had one been called on to live among such surroundings, and bear one's part in the fierce battle of trade that ceases neither by day nor night.

But as we left the town behind and emerged into the smoke-laden country round it, there came a revulsion of feeling. The sight of what by nature must once have been a beautiful district now marred and scarred by man's handiwork; of grand old churches and great country-houses cheek by jowl with gaunt smoking collieries and their attendant squalid pit-villages; of stunted trees and foul, polluted streams; of the whole face of nature starved, and pinched, and poisoned with noxious fumes, brought with it an intense, if selfish, sense of relief that one's lot was cast in "a greener, cleaner, land," where coal-pits are not, and where man extracts his livelihood from the bosom and not the bowels of the earth.

Oct. 14th.—To the Bench, where B. told me a good story. He has been spending the autumn at a small watering-place on the west coast, near which, but separated from the town by a deep ravine, stands a magnificent villa, the residence of a gentleman who has

recently retired from the manufacture of a popular patent medicine, with a large fortune and a brand new title. So large indeed was the former that, to shorten the distance between himself and the town, he threw a handsome iron bridge across the ravine in question. At the time of the last Jubilee he sought to pay a double debt to himself and the public, by throwing open the bridge to the latter on payment of a toll of a penny, and further, wishing posterity to be cognisant of his munificence, he affixed a neatly enamelled placard to the toll-house, setting forth that: “This Bridge, erected by Sir Gorgius Midas of Bellavista House, was opened to the Public in Commemoration of the Diamond Jubilee of her Majesty Queen Victoria.” So far, so good, but the worthy knight, anxious like Sam Weller to “end off with a w'erse,” boldly altered a well-known Latin quotation to suit his purpose, and added “*Generosus nascitur, non fit.*”

When the real construction of “generosus”¹ is taken into consideration, I can hardly conceive an adjective less applicable to the gentleman in question.

Oct. 15th.—I have to-day received an excellent illustration of the fact that those who judge others are liable to be judged themselves. On my return home from the North I received an urgent appeal from my friend, the secretary of our Hunt, to try and assuage the wrath of my neighbour, Mr. Tiplady, who is again at variance with fox-hunting, and *impiger, irritabilis,*

¹ Well-born.

iracundus, has warned the Master not to cross his farm on penalty of recourse to such extreme measures as loaded firearms. It appears that last week hounds ran across Tiplady's land, and a gap was accidentally made in his boundary fence, through which his ram strayed on to a neighbouring holding. Here it fell in with another gentleman sheep, which it rashly challenged to single combat, with the unfortunate result that it was killed at the very first onslaught. Its enraged owner at once sent in a claim for about treble its value, and, moreover, declined to allow the Hunt to cross his farm again, nor could my diplomatic efforts induce him to abate jot or tittle of his terms. In vain did I point out the benefits conferred on agriculture by fox-hunting; in vain did I appeal to his generosity, pointing that no one would grudge a sheep after such a "werry fine run"; in vain did I descant on the glories of our noblest sport; Mr. Tiplady would have none of my honied arguments. For, according to him, not only was this particular ram of purest blood and most stainless pedigree, but it was, moreover, a very Bayard among sheep, like unto none other of its species in gentleness and amiability; wherefore he claimed that its mere market value was insufficient solatium to his wounded feelings, and that moral and intellectual damages were due to him as well. "Ar want nowt but whet's reet," he kept insisting, in his ear-grating Northern dialect, "but ar'll not hev mar toop killed, and mar fences broke, not for neobody." I finally had to return home discomfited, cursing Tip-

lady for a curmudgeon, and at dinner that evening gave Belinda, who, of course, was inclined to take the fellow's part, a rather high-flown lecture on the churlishness of those who will not cheerfully undergo a little inconvenience for the sake of fox-hunting.

But mark the finger of Fate! This morning I was sitting in the smoking-room waiting for the lunch-bell to ring, when I was astonished to see the whole of my establishment stream past the window, led by the scullery-maid, who, her apron over her head, scoured the plain like a very Camilla, and whipped in by Thomas hobbling along, rake in hand. At first, like the old lady in Pickwick, I thought the kitchen chimney must be on fire, but at that moment,

Clamorque virum, clangorque tubarum

explained the cause of the unwonted excitement, and snatching up a hat, I too sallied forth to see the fun. Now, as a rule, when hounds turn up unexpectedly in one's neighbourhood, one does not participate to any great extent in the pleasures of the chase; one catches a stray blast of the horn, a few notes from the pack, and perhaps gets a glimpse of distant horsemen disappearing over hedges or through gates. But to-day, to the intense joy of my domestics, the fox, a sorely beaten cub, came straight towards them, and, heedless of feminine shrieks and masculine yells, crawled, scarce a hundred yards ahead of the hounds, into the kitchen garden, and lay down in a bed of winter broccoli. Then, powerless to prevent them, I foresaw the inevitable consequences.

Next moment the pack swarmed into the garden, and for two minutes the wretched fox was hunted round and round my domain, seeking first the shelter of my spring vegetables, and then of my bedded-out plants. The field came galloping down the newly-gravelled drive; the unemployed of the village turned out in their shirt-sleeves and joined in the chase over the flower-beds; a very small boy on a Shetland pony galloped *ventre-à-terre* across the croquet lawn, and an excited stranger on a pulling horse added insult to injury by first nearly riding me down on my own carriage-drive, and then asking me what the devil I meant by being there? Finally, Terma-gant got the cub by the back in the middle of Belinda's new chrysanthemums; Joe, the huntsman, with profuse apologies, blew his hounds out of the garden, and transacted the last obsequies of the chase in the paddock behind the stables; our Master, always the pink of politeness, presented the mask to Belinda, and I dispensed such hasty hospitality as lay in my power to his followers, who presently departed smoking my cigars, leaving me to listen to Thomas's plaints over the ruin of his garden,—*his* garden, forsooth!—and to reflect on the churlishness of those who will not cheerfully put up with a little inconvenience for the sake of fox-hunting.

Oct. 18th.—A long letter from D., wherein he relates an incident that, were such testimony required, would furnish fresh proof of the axiom that fact is stranger than fiction. Not far from him in Yorkshire live a childless old couple, Robert and Nancy Dowson, the

tenants of one of those little farms that fringe the northern moors; some sixty or seventy acres of sweet limestone-bottomed grass, a grey, stone-roofed house, and so many "stints"—the right of running sheep on the adjacent fells. Yet, despite the smallness of their holding, the Dowsons were in quite comfortable circumstances: like most of their class they were thrifty to the verge of parsimony; they lived a life of unceasing hard work, and for forty years neither of them had probably known a day of complete rest, much less enjoyment. Had such been the case it is probable that the incident I am relating would never have occurred.

One morning last April old Nancy Dowson tramped off, basket on arm, as was her weekly custom, to the neighbouring little town of C. Here she appeared in the market, sold her butter and eggs, chatted freely with her friends and acquaintances, and then going off by herself to the local Bank, withdrew £60, in notes and gold, and subsequently disappeared as completely as though the earth had swallowed her up! Needless to say that, once she was missed, the whole country-side was roused to search for her; every pond and river in the neighbourhood was dragged; the fells were hunted with men and dogs for miles; the case was widely advertised by the Press; every police station in England was placarded with her description: in fine, no stone was left unturned to trace her, but in vain. Not the slightest clue could be found of her movements after she left the Bank, and at last it was universally agreed she must have been murdered and the body mysteriously disposed of, for the

sake of the money she had obtained on the day of her disappearance, though here again, her reason for requiring so large a sum was inexplicable.

Old Dowson took his bereavement like a hard-headed north-countryman: he had probably loved his wife in his own unemotional way, but he was not one who carried his heart on his sleeve; and after a time he just went about his business as usual, so that there were not wanting good-natured friends to hint that he regretted his money more than his wife. And now in October the whole country-side has been roused by the astonishing news that old Nancy has returned as quietly and as mysteriously as she disappeared; walking into the farmhouse one afternoon and resuming her duties as its mistress as though she had never abandoned them! The only explanation she vouchsafes of her absence is as simple as—to me at least—it is intelligible: she wanted a holiday. In her old age there had come upon her a revolt against the dull monotony of her existence: she was haunted with a *Wanderlust*, and yearned to see something of the great outside world; and having distant relatives—whom she had never seen—in America, she quietly shipped herself off to the New World, and presented herself to them as unconcernedly as she had left home. Fortunately, they were well-to-do and kindly folk, who not only kept her as their guest all the time she was away, but even paid her expenses, and gave her a handsome present to boot, so that she actually returned home richer than she left—a feat of which I think no one but a Yorkshire or a Scotch woman could be

THE NORTHERN MOORS.





capable. No doubt this latter fact has rather smoothed over any awkwardness with her husband, for after a rather stormy scene, during which pointed references were made to broomsticks and horsewhips, D. tells me that the old couple are quite reconciled, and that life goes on in its former jog-trot fashion at the little moorland farm. The most extraordinary feature of the whole affair to me is that the old woman, once she had safely reached America, should not have written to her husband—I can understand her not telling him that she meant to go there—but Belinda, who has been much interested in this story, accounts for her silence by the theory, that if her husband had known where she was, he would have come out to fetch her home, and so have spoilt her holiday: a train of feminine reasoning I am unable to follow.

Oct. 20th.—At the risk of vain repetition, I cannot forbear once more adverting to the astonishing change which has come over the agricultural labouring classes within the last twenty or thirty years; their dislike to their hereditary vocation, and their disinclination to live on the land. Nowadays they must all needs earn their livelihood in a town, and—young Hodge's highest aspiration—wear a seedy black coat and a made-up tie, and toil in some stifling office or shop for no better wage than he would have earned as a waggoner or a shepherd. No one admits more readily than myself the evils which formerly were, and in some districts still are, responsible for this state of affairs; evils for which, alas! the upper classes were far too accountable. Insanitary dwellings,

insufficient wages and, consequent, insufficient food, and a monotonous and dreary existence, to which intoxication on the vilest of liquor offered the only palliative, were a combination not calculated to raise the agricultural population, either morally or physically.

But in all the above unhappy shortcomings the lot of the agricultural labourer has been enormously improved of late years; while it was confidently asserted that the introduction of School Boards, and consequent superior education would prove the panacea for all his further ills. Well, Hodge has been educated for a quarter of a century, and what has been the result of his superior education? It can be summed up in one ugly word—discontent. By this I do not mean the socialistic or anarchistic discontent of continental countries, nor, thank God, do I think this will ever come in England, but general dissatisfaction with his lot and things in general. As Mr. Rudyard Kipling has said of another member of society, “he knows too much and does too little.” No doubt, the English peasant *was* badly treated two generations ago, but so was Chummy the sweep, and Chips the carpenter, and Geordie the pitman, and a great many other deserving people as well, including those who wield the weapon poetically reputed mightier than the sword. But all these gentlemen have participated in the blessings of superior education, and yet none of them have responded to the spur of learning in the same way as Hodge; firstly, perhaps, because they live a little more in touch with the outside world, and secondly, because the latter’s education is totally beyond and outside either

his requirements or his vocation. Only last week out shooting, Joe, the son of the ploughman at the Moor Farm, was carrying my cartridge-bag for me. I asked him what special work he was engaged on at school. "Oi be dra-a-in' a map o' h'Orsetrier," he replied confidently. A map of Austria! for a country lad of fourteen who has not yet learned to guide a plough, nor even fork muck out of a cart.

I should dearly like to see some proportion of the School Board rate in agricultural districts applied to instilling the rudiments of their hereditary handicrafts into such labourers' sons as have mastered the three R's, By this I do not mean the endowment of institutions where young gentlemen in breeches and gaiters dabble in agricultural chemistry, but sound technical instruction in the elements of ploughing, draining, hedging, and ditching; arts which their forefathers were content to practise, but which the present generation of countrymen have not only forgotten, but evince the greatest disinclination to learn.

It will probably be urged that it is undesirable, if not impossible, to make distinctions between classes in the matter of State-aided education, and that it is unfair to deny to any man the possible benefits derived from scholarship, but to this I would reply, that, in the present overcrowded state of every profession, not one man in a thousand, be he shepherd or solicitor, can ever hope to attain to more than mediocrity. If it be in him to rise in the world, rise he will, education or no education, ample proof of which fact may be found among our

modern aristocracy ; but here perhaps I am trenching on delicate ground. Of one thing, however, I am convinced by experience, and that is, that out of the many agricultural labourers I have known in my life, the worst educated have usually been not only the best craftsmen in their particular vocation, but also the steadiest and most respectable men.

Oct. 25th.—I fancy that were most of us, when consulting our medical adviser, to be told that we might eat anything we liked, we should accept this as a proof of the excellent state of our health and not unwillingly follow the prescription to the letter ; but I find such is not the case in agricultural circles. Coming out of church this morning I stopped to speak to young Swainson—what would Sunday be in the country without its “crack in the Kirkyard” ?—and to ask after his uncle, old Mr. Swainson of Oakshott Farm, who has long been ailing. “Thank you, sir,” he replied, assuming that ultra-dolorous expression invariably deemed decorous by his class when referring to illness, “my uncle is very bad, and I am afraid the end cannot be very far off now ; for when the doctor was up yesterday he told him he might eat anything he fancied, and you know what a bad sign it is *when they tell you that !*”

Oct. 28th.—To X. on business, and having an hour to spare turned into the club for a cup of tea, where I found the usual conclave of members engaged in discussing their neighbours’ shortcomings. I rarely visit the

X. Club, but whenever I do so, I am always fortified in my opinion that there exists nowhere on earth, save perhaps an Eastern bazaar, such a hot-bed of gossip as the club of a provincial town. London clubs are not without reproach in this respect, and I imagine some prime scandal is retailed during those mysterious nocturnal visits which ladies pay to one another's bedrooms in country houses; but for real genuine unadulterated tittle-tattle give me the club of a cathedral town like X., where the ecclesiastical element is leavened by a large admixture of half-pay colonels and retired Anglo-Indians: gentlemen of sufficient leisure to enable them to interest themselves in other people's affairs no less than their own.

To-day the chief topic of conversation was the unhappy difference that has arisen between the Hunt and Mr. B., the tenant of Waterfield Park, who has forbidden hounds to draw, or even run through, his coverts before Christmas. This vexed question of foxes *versus* pheasants, which assumes such alarming proportions in some parts of England, had not hitherto disturbed our peaceful shire; and consequently the present awkwardness is creating a most exceeding pother, and nowhere apparently more so than in the smoking-room of the X. Club; which is the more remarkable as so few of its members ever indulge in the pleasures of the chase. However, the matter afforded a most fertile field for argument, and opinions appeared much divided, though I am afraid the partisans of the pheasant were in a numerical superiority.

While drinking my tea, I listened with the deference

loudly - expressed sentiments of Surgeon - Lieutenant-Colonel Mango, late I.M.S., who was refuting with great energy the self-evolved theory that "because some d——d tailor"—this is verbatim—"puts on a red coat, he should consider himself entitled to gallop over another man's property." I confess I had not heard of any trespass by the Hunt on the grounds of Agra Villa, the Colonel's neat residence, so I presume his contention was hypothetical; but I had unfortunately to leave to catch my train before hearing the arguments raised in refutation of it.

Still this is not altogether a laughing matter, rendered the more regrettable by the fact that it could have been so easily avoided by a little mutual forbearance. No one can pretend to place fox-hunting and shooting on the same level, whether from a national or a sporting standpoint; and consequently, hunting-men are inclined to be a little overbearing, and not make sufficient allowance for other people's tastes in the matter of sport; while, on the other hand, your shooter, pure and simple, is equally prone to egotism, and to forget that

"One fox on foot more diversion will bring
Than twice twenty thousand cock-pheasants on wing."

None the less, in the present instance there is a good deal to be said on Mr. B.'s side. He is a partner in one of the great London private banks, a Member of Parliament, and a man of acknowledged social position. His one foible is shooting, and he admittedly took Waterfield with the object of rearing a great head of

game; but although he is a first-rate shot, and the very antitype of the accepted notion of a city sportsman, a certain intolerant section of the hunting people in the county thought fit to dub him a Cockney, to hint at his disregard of every possible canon of sportsmanlike behaviour, and finally, without a tittle of *direct* evidence, to accuse his keepers of vulpicide. As B. is no more than human, this sort of thing has naturally “put his back up,” until, from being merely indifferent to hunting, he has now become absolutely antagonistic to it; and it is much to be feared that there will not be a single litter of cubs in the Waterfield coverts next spring: a deplorable state of affairs that might easily have been avoided by the exercise of a little tact.

Still, I do not share the views of those alarmists who predict that the present universal friction between hunting and shooting interests will soon sound the death-knell of the former. I believe it to be only a transient evil, due to the agricultural depression which has wrought an astonishing change in both owners and tenants of country estates. Fifty years ago a gentleman in B.’s position would probably have lived—as, indeed, his father did—in a luxurious villa at Roehampton, and contented himself with growing pine-apples and kindred diversions, instead of renting grouse-moors and rearing pheasants. But nowadays the opulent bankers and merchants take their pleasure far more healthfully than their sires in field-sports; and as but few of them were probably entered to hunting in their youth, they turn to shooting. It is not given to every man to bestride

a horse with either comfort to himself or elegance to the onlooker, but any one can fire off a gun, even if he does not hit the object he aims at. Not, however, that these gentlemen are as a rule either bad shots or ignorant of the habits of game; far from it: the Cockney sportsman of the beginning of the last century is as extinct as the clumsy caricaturists who used to portray him. But their sons, and especially, it seems to me, their daughters, who enjoy opportunities denied to their parents, all seem to take to hunting as naturally as a duck to water—B.'s children come out regularly on their ponies—and as it is on the rising generation that the future depends, I have no fears for hunting.

No doubt, history will repeat itself in years to come. Nearly all our territorial families, great and small, have sprung, and will continue to spring, from trade. Land, of its own unaided increment, refuses to support the same owners for more than a certain number of generations, and the day will inevitably come when the rising race of landowners will become as impoverished as the passing one, and will yield in its turn to the *nouveaux riches* of the period. Then, I have no doubt, exactly the same petty jealousies will arise, and the same controversies rage, about fox-hunting, or aerial navigation, or submarine yachting, or whatever may be the fashionable amusement of the day.

NOVEMBER

Nov. 2nd.—This is the day on which, according to my almanac, the pursuit of the fox becomes legitimate, and consequently Belinda insisted on driving me to the meet in her pony-cart—a form of diversion I heartily detest. Nowadays, when I am compelled to forego the pleasures of the chase, except on the rare occasions when I snatch a fearful joy by bringing up the tail of the hunt on Peter, our venerable slave of all work, I have a fine natural jealousy of such of my fellow-creatures as are more fortunately situated, and it affords me no gratification to be driven to the meet to be a passive spectator of their pleasure. I am aware that this is a most unchristian spirit, of which I ought to be thoroughly ashamed; but it requires a person of more philosophical temperament than myself to see, as I did this morning, hounds and horsemen streaming away over a beautiful line of country, while I was left holding the pony's head in a narrow, muddy lane, in company with half-a-dozen other vehicles filled with ladies; a butcher, whose customers, I trust, did not require their joints for an early dinner; a small girl on a Shetland pony attached by a leading-rein to a very fat coachman on a carriage-horse; and a curate on a bicycle. It made me “feel tired,” to use a most expressive Americanism, and re-

pudiating Belinda's hint that we should follow on the line of the hounds, we drove home, when I ate a great deal more lunch than was good for me, and fell asleep over the smoking - room fire afterwards—*une journée manquée.*

By the way, I was much struck to-day by the careless dress—"get-up" is a happier expression—of so many of the field. Time was when every gentleman who hunted did so in a pink, or at least a black, coat, with appropriate breeches and boots, but now people come out in every imaginable form of mufti; drab suits, yellow boots, billy-cock hats, tweed coats, and, most offensive of all to my eye, white breeches and black boots.

I cannot but think this carelessness as to appearance in the hunting-field most deplorable, as it undoubtedly renders fox-hunting less attractive to the multitude, but especially to those by whose good-will the sport chiefly exists; farmers, agricultural labourers, and the like. In common with a great many other things, hunting depends very largely on sentiment, and while the sight of a "bit of pink" rejoices the average Briton's heart, I defy any one to wax enthusiastic over a snuff-coloured cut-away and blucher-boots. It is like comparing the hideous active-service khaki of our army with its traditional glorious scarlet.

I expressed these opinions freely to F., who dropped in during the afternoon for gruel for his horse, and tea for himself, and who was garbed in what, when I was young, we used to style "rat-catching" attire. However, so far from being impressed by my eloquence, he

informed me that he did not consider it good form for a man who only owned one horse to wear even a black coat out hunting; an opinion which I privately think savours rather of snobbishness.

I often wonder how these little foibles of the hunting-field originated; or what *arbiter elegantiarum* first decreed that the sportsman who can only afford one horse should not be as well dressed as the one who has two; or, equally inexplicable, why a man should not wear his own hunt button or collar in a strange country? The first point, I venture to think, is one of entirely modern growth, but the second is of long standing, as this anecdote, which I chanced on recently, will show.

Two honest Cheshire squires visited Melton about the time that Nimrod wrote his famous "Quarterly" run, and turned up at the meet, to the horror of the assembled dandies, in all the glory of their green collars. The unhappy Provincials soon became aware, from the demeanour of the rest of the field, that they had been guilty of some aberration from the path of Leicestershire etiquette, but it was left for Lord Alvanley to point it out to them, which he did in a manner peculiarly his own. "You must have brought your fox a long way this morning, gentlemen?" he said, addressing them with the most exquisite politeness, and eyeing their collars with an air of innocent surprise.

Nov. 7th.—A long letter from Tom, who has just returned from Norway, where he annually spends several

months somewhere within the Arctic Circle; and where this year he appears to have experienced the most terrible forms of bad weather. His river was in constant flood, rendering fishing impossible; and he only got two elk, so he has returned home rather out of temper with his holiday. As usual, however, he has brought back a good story. He came home by way of Stockholm, where he foregathered with a Swedish gentleman, who invited him to participate in a day's shooting not far from that city. Tom accepted, nothing loath, and next morning he and his new friend took the field, accompanied by a huge black and white German pointer, rejoicing in the name of Figaro. Presently they came to a dense patch of fir and willow scrub, and the kindly Swede, having posted Tom at its further end, boldly plunged into it with his dog, to drive it up to him. Soon a warning shout from the Swede, and a bark from Figaro, proclaimed that game was astir, and a splendid old black-cock came rocketing high over Tom's head, who brought it down some distance behind him; a most satisfactory shot. But hardly had it touched the ground ere Figaro burst from the thicket, and, heedless of Tom's shouts and menaces, snatched up the bird and, retiring to some bushes, proceeded to eat it at his leisure! ("How the devil I refrained from shooting the brute, I can't make out," comments my outraged friend.) After a time its owner emerged, hot and panting, from the undergrowth, and asked Tom if he had killed anything? He explained matters, and, pointing to Figaro licking his blood-stained chops over what was left of the black-cock, naturally

expected to see him receive a well-merited chastisement. All his master did, however, was to pat him on the head, and say apologetically, "Ach, poor fellow! he was hungry!"

I don't think we shall ever understand the ways of foreign sportsmen, nor they, ours. Some years ago, being at Geneva, I described fox-hunting as well as I could to an amiable Swiss gentleman, who had heard of the sport, and was much interested in it. Finally, he wanted to know what costume was "*de rigueur*." I explained this to the best of my ability, "*habit rouge, culotte blanche en peau de daim, bottes à revers*," and paused for breath. "*Et avec ça*," broke in my friend, his eye kindling with enthusiasm, "*un beau chapeau empanaché?*"

Again, when I was a lad, I was sent to spend a few months *en pension* with a French family, with a view to improving my knowledge of foreign tongues. The gentleman to whose care I was entrusted, and whom I will call M. Tricoche, was one of those typical Frenchmen whom Du Maurier used to love to portray: a stout, good-natured Gascon, intensely emotional, a great *bon-vivant*, and to use his own words, "*un chasseur enragé*." With equal truth he might have added that he was the most unfortunate, or maladroit, sportsman of his department. Every afternoon he used to sally forth, accompanied by a very fat pointer called Polydore, to wage war against the *feræ naturæ* of the neighbourhood, only to invariably return home at night, what he termed "*bredouille*." But, "*rebus adversis, fortis et animosus*," he never appeared discouraged by his lack of success,

for which he would account by those ingenious arguments common to the unlucky sportsman of all nationalities.

But everything comes to him who knows how to wait, and one evening I was summoned to the kitchen where I found the whole establishment; Madame Tricoche, Mademoiselle Mélanie, her daughter, Adèle, the "*bonne à tout-faire*," and Jean the gardener, collected round the corpse of a fine hare, which they were examining with many shrill ejaculations of admiration and approval. For once M. Tricoche had not returned "*bredouille*." Presently, when the animal had been sufficiently pinched and poked, and after Mademoiselle Mélanie had asked me if we had such fine beasts in England, her father proceeded to tell us how he had succeeded in bagging it. He was coming home, as usual, empty-handed, when in crossing a meadow he suddenly became aware of the hare at his very feet "*en gîte*." Here he paused in his narration, and surveying his auditors with a melodramatic air, suddenly shook his fingers at them, and repeated in a hoarse whisper, "*en gîte*"; a statement which moved the sycophantic Jean to ejaculate, "*Aha! le coquin!*"

Now how to deal with a hare squatting in its form would not present any great difficulty to most people, but not so with M. Tricoche. He was so close to it that if he shot it sitting he would blow it to bits, and so render it unfit for the table; while, on the other hand, if he kicked it up and tried to shoot it running, he would inevitably miss it. For a breathing-space he therefore

remained motionless; “*immobile, en proie à une vive agitation,*” but he finally hit on the happy expedient of retreating *backwards* on tip-toe, until he had placed sufficient distance between himself and his victim to warrant his pouring both barrels of his gun into it! This was a piece of rare good fortune, which would assuredly set the seal on M. Tricoche’s fame as a sportsman, for to bag a hare, sitting or otherwise, was an event of such rarity in that neighbourhood as to ensure a laudatory paragraph for the lucky *chasseur* in the local paper.

Now, to the average Englishman, all this fuss over the slaughter of a sitting hare would seem as extraordinary as contemptible, but to an honest *bourgeois* like M. Tricoche, it had no such degrading aspect. He had gone out shooting in a district almost devoid of game, and returned home with a fine hare, and that he had been able to bag it sitting was a piece of especial good fortune of which, far from being ashamed, he was actually proud. Moreover, having caught his hare, he was also able to cook it, a feat of which no Englishman would be capable, for with his own hands he subsequently converted it into a *civet de lièvre*, the flavour of which I can remember to this day.

Nov. 10th.—To-day the vicar told me an anecdote curiously illustrative of the respect in which, even now-a-days, the Established Church is still held by the lower orders. Last week he was summoned to the sick-bed of old Jem Hall, shoemaker, ranter, and Radical; and

on leaving expressed his gratification to Mrs. Hall that he, and not a Dissenting minister, should have been sent for. "Well, sir," she replied, "my poor 'usband is very bad, and, you see, we allus sends for Parson *at the finish!*"

Nov. 11th.—Coming in late this afternoon, I found Belinda in the unaccustomed fit of low spirits which experience has taught me to associate with some domestic tragedy, and indeed the magnitude of the present one has produced a corresponding depression of mind on myself. It sounds a very small matter, yet only those who live in the country can appreciate its importance. Ellen, the cook, a most excellent servant, has given notice of her intention to leave, nor can Belinda's entreaties, nor my offer of increased wages, induce her to reconsider her decision. She is kind enough to express her perfect good opinion of our unworthy selves—which, I suppose, ought to be some little balm in our Gilead—and repudiates with scorn the suggestion that her departure is in any way connected with the butcher, an eligible widower, whose cart I have noticed of late stands considerably longer at the back-door than is essential either to the delivery of joints, or the receipt of orders. No; "she cannot put up any longer with the dulness of the country;" so go she must, and I shall always think regretfully of her, and a certain *soufflé* with mushrooms in it that was her masterpiece.

This present dearth of servants, but especially of cooks, is, I believe, a momentous question everywhere,

but nowhere so much as in the country, where no amount of wages will induce them to engage themselves. I suppose it is the spread of so-called "education" which disinclines the women of the working classes—men-servants are usually easily obtained—from entering domestic service. Yet they cannot all become typewriters, or shop-assistants, or even burlesque actresses; they cannot all marry as soon as they grow up, and they cannot all live at home on their parents.

What has become of the servants of my youth, the strong, country-bred women, who desired—and with reason—no better lot than to enter a gentleman's service, and who would often spend a lifetime in the same family, sharing its troubles and its joys, until they almost came to be regarded as one of its members; who guarded their master's reputation and property as jealously as if they were their own, and who watched his children grow up and go forth into the world, with almost the feelings of a parent? Where are they, I repeat? As well ask, "*Où sont les neiges d'autan?*" They have vanished; improved off the face of society by higher education and a cheap press; and one can only be thankful to have lived in a generation that knew them.

There is probably no art so universally neglected in England as cooking, and yet—I say this in all seriousness—there are few others of such national importance. I am firmly convinced that, next to our unhappy climate, the chief cause of the drunkenness among our working men, is the abominably cooked and served food they are called on to eat in their homes. It is not that the

food in itself is bad; far from it. But give any ordinary working-man's wife the "juiciest" beefsteak, or the "prime" piece of mutton to prepare for her husband's dinner, and she inevitably transforms it into a lump of unpalatable, indigestible matter; while words fail me when I think of the vegetables, the flabby, noisome cabbage, and the watery potatoes, I have occasionally seen on poor people's tables. Small wonder, then, that a man who works hard all day, and whose frame requires palatable food, cannot assimilate such nauseating fare, and repairs to the nearest public-house to drown the cravings of indigestion in strong drink, which, but too often drugged and adulterated, only serves to accentuate the evil.

Nor are the middle classes, who cannot afford to pay high wages to their cooks, in any better plight, and in these days of County Councils, when the masses receive technical education at the expense of the classes, it is extraordinary that no effort has been made to cope with an evil which affects the poor and the well-to-do alike. Permanent schools of cookery should be established in every county town, and no pains spared to induce the working-classes to attend them. They would be the means of bringing happiness to many a hitherto comfortless home, and relief to many disorganised digestions, while a diploma of efficiency in the higher branches of the culinary art would assure to its fortunate recipient an income far exceeding that of the mere governess or curate.

Nov. 15th.—Now is the time of year marked out for the slaughter of that pampered product of modern civilisation, the hand-reared pheasant; and every country house of any pretensions is filled for covert-shooting. To my mind few things are more remarkable, or serve better to indicate the luxurious tendencies of the age, than the growth of this branch of sport; for I am old enough to remember when it was styled “battue” shooting, and as such was persistently held up to contempt in the columns of the Press; when it was the exclusive prerogative of the rich; and when to kill a couple of hundred pheasants in one day would have been stigmatised by a number of doubtless well-meaning people as “mere butchery.” Nowadays a bag of thrice that amount scarcely excites comment, and great landowners and small squires alike deem it incumbent on them to rear pheasants.

Whether covert-shooting be sport in the highest sense of the word is no doubt open to question; indeed, under modern conditions, very little shooting in our over-crowded islands can properly be described as such; but it is, without dispute, an admirable and enjoyable form of amusement; it promotes the circulation of an immense amount of money, and, paradoxical as such a statement may seem, the enormous stock of pheasants it has called into existence has tended more than anything else to put down poaching. Formerly, when it was considered —Heaven knows why—derogatory for a landowner to sell his surplus game, poaching was a lucrative profession; and those were the days of bloody affrays between keepers and organised gangs of ruffians; but now when

all game, but especially pheasants, is almost a drug in the market, poaching for profit has lost its *raison d'être*.

There is another feature of country-house visits which seems to me to have increased in much the same proportion as the pheasant, and that is the question of vails to servants. Belinda and I have just returned from spending a couple of days with the M.'s, and after a stay of about sixty hours in a friend's house, it behoved me to fee no less than six servants: butler, footman, coachman, housemaid, keeper, and loader,—a social tax that is, I venture to think rather excessive, and which is becoming more and more oppressive every day. True, there exist I know, certain great houses the owners of which are wealthy enough to pay their servants such wages as to enable them to offer unadulterated hospitality to their friends, but such establishments are few and far between, and there are few hosts who can expect their domestics to entirely dispense with tips, nor, on the other hand, many guests who care to entail extra trouble on a friend's establishment without some form of recognition on their own part.

It is a vexed question, and perhaps the best solution of it is the system of having a money-box, into which guests can put as much as they think fit, or can afford, and the contents of which are subsequently divided among the servants. But even this plan may be open to abuse, as the following anecdote, which was told me as perfectly true, will show. A gentleman who had been staying in a country house, travelled back to

London at the conclusion of his visit in company with a fellow-guest, a young gentleman of Semitic extraction, who remarked, as he lit his cigar and settled himself into a corner of the railway-carriage, “Well, I’ve thoroughly enjoyed my visit. I’ve had a capital ball, and two rippin’ days’ shootin’; I’ve won £7, 10s. at Bridge, and it’s only cost me my railway fare, *and a Swiss franc I put in the servants’ box!*”

Despite my grumble about tips, I much enjoyed my visit to M.’s, and had two pleasant days’ shooting. By the way, our host told us rather a good story while we were smoking after lunch yesterday. Last week he had been shooting at B. Castle, where the party consisted of a few country neighbours like himself, and a sprinkling of London dandies, each of whom took the field attended by a servant bearing his master’s second gun and waterproof. M. had only one gun, but requiring some one to carry his cartridges, selected, from purely charitable motives, old Tommy Bates, who was one of the beaters. Tommy is one of those individuals to be found in every country village, who never seem to do a complete day’s work, nor have a full meal, nor wear a decent suit of clothes, but who, none the less, always appear perfectly contented with their lot in life. It would appear, however, that old Bates, whom I know well, and who is certainly the dirtiest as well as the laziest of his class, is not without that straining after display, from which I am afraid no man is entirely exempt, for, having girded on M.’s cartridge-bag, he at once abandoned his place in the line of beaters and stalked

solemnly behind him, imitating to the best of his ability the bored expression and languid gait of the gentlemen's gentlemen from London. His defection from his proper business of beating did not long escape the notice of the head-keeper, who called to him "to coom oop in laine and beat they bushes." No response from Mr. Bates, who walked on with his nose in the air as though he had heard nothing, but in answer to a louder and more peremptory summons, he deprecatingly replied, "I bain't beating to-day." "Then what are you 'ere for, I'd like to know?" roared the indignant keeper, to which old Tommy, with great dignity, replied, "I be Mr. M.'s *valet!*"

Fired by the success of M.'s anecdote, I contributed a personal experience of my own, but although it was perfectly true, my audience absolutely refused to accept it as such: a humiliating state of affairs, but too often the lot of the narrator of the truth. Two or three years ago, I had been shooting on the other side of the county, and coming home by train entered into conversation with a fellow-traveller, who, noticing my gun-case, asked if I had had good sport. "Very good indeed," I answered. "We got 200 head to four guns." "You don't say so," ejaculated the stranger, apparently lost in astonishment at the magnitude of the bag, "that must have been magnificent sport." He paused a moment, and then insinuatingly added, "*Double-barrelled* guns, I presume?"

I have since occasionally wondered whether this gentleman was quite as innocent of sporting phraseology as he

professed to be, or whether he was not, in the slang of the day, "pulling my leg."

Nov. 17th.—This afternoon to the meeting at X., mutually convened by our local Agricultural Society and the Hunt Club, to try and arrive at a *modus vivendi* as to wire fencing, which has lately assumed rather formidable proportions in our country, not, I am thankful to say, from any animosity towards hunting on the part of the farmers, but from the present *res angusta* of agriculture. Twenty years ago, I do not think that such a thing as a wire fence existed within the length and breadth of our Hunt; now, in some parts of it, there is scarcely a farm on which wire is not found in a more or less modified degree. Still, hideous as a strained wire fence is, and inimical as it may be to sport, it cannot reasonably be held to be dangerous, for its unlovely nakedness is in itself sufficient warning of its unjumpable nature. Such fences are no doubt apt to tear hounds, and, as all farmers readily admit, are harmful to stock, but they offer no special danger to horses or riders, and have to be tolerated like a great many other objectionable things in this world. It is the single strand of wire run through a thin, quickset hedge, or the short length—but too often barbed—put in to mend a gap, that are the real sources of danger to hunting-people, and cause the horrible accidents we deplore every season. As often as not this has been merely used as a temporary measure, and then overlooked: a farmer, or his shepherd, finds

his stock getting through a weak place in a hedge on to a neighbour's wheat or turnips; a state of things that has, of course, to be immediately remedied. So he casts about in his mind for some means of doing so, and, having no other material available, bethinks him of that bit of wire that is lying about in the barn, and this being in addition easily manipulated, he twists it across the gap, with the result that next time hounds cross his land some wretched horse may be cut to ribbons, and a fellow-creature—perhaps a woman!—fatally injured, or crippled and maimed for life.

This was the evil we tried to cope with to-day, and I am glad to say the farmers met us in the fair spirit they always show when properly approached. After a long sitting it was agreed to issue "Danger" flags free to all occupiers of land who would apply for them; while a committee, composed partly of farmers, and partly of hunting-men, was elected to inquire generally into complaints as to damage to fences. Where it is conclusively proved to their satisfaction that this is the result of hunting, the necessary material for repairs will be given by the Hunt, and, with a further view to generally discourage the use of wire in any form, it was determined to supply posts and rails at a trifle below cost price to all farmers who require them for legitimate fencing purposes, and who cannot obtain them from their landlords; the deficit from this item being met from the Hunt funds. The meeting broke up in high good humour, and I hope

the scheme may prove a success, but I feel sincerely thankful that I was not asked to serve on the joint committee.

There was, however, one feature of our conference this afternoon that was painful to me, and that was the ill-concealed attitude of one or two "irreconcilables" among the hunting-men, who seemed to think that the use of his land for hunting is a matter in which a tenant-farmer should have no voice whatever, and that everything should be subordinated to the sentimental notion that fox-hunting is a national sport outside the pale of criticism. It is useless to attempt argument with such people, who do far more harm to the cause of hunting than the ignorant or cantankerous farmer who wires his fences, or forbids hounds to cross his holding; but I would ask them to imagine a somewhat apposite parallel. Presuming a gentleman in their own class of life to invite them to shoot over his estate or fish his river whenever they felt inclined to do so, would they not do all in their power to mark their appreciation of the privilege, and carefully refrain from abusing it in any way? How much higher then should they rate the courtesy of the man, who, their inferior in position, allows them to amuse themselves at his expense over land for which he pays rent, and to which he looks for his livelihood?

Nov. 23rd.—We have lately had a succession of clear moonlit nights and easterly gales, and I was not sur-

prised when last evening I received an invitation from S. to "come over and help him" to-day, as his coverts were "full of cock." This is an expression which I knew better than to interpret too literally, as ours is a very poor neighbourhood for woodcock; but, on the other hand, S. owns the best covert for them in it; nearly eighty acres of coarse hummocky grass, and foul slithering mud oozing with sour water; dense thickets of alder and birch, a few clumps of Scotch fir and hollies, and here and there a stunted oak, looking thoroughly ashamed of its surroundings. It is a sight to make a forester weep; but it has irresistible attractions for a woodcock wearied by a long flight from "Norroway o'er the foem."

Still, one can never depend on the cock staying in it: they are here to-day and gone to-morrow: a fact common to all localities, which enormously increases the sporting attractions of these wayward birds. To-day we got nine of them to three guns walking, or rather scrambling, in line, besides a few wild pheasants and rabbits: a charming rough shoot. To my mind this is the only way to really enjoy woodcock shooting: to make it the main object of your day's sport, to which all other game is secondary, while, with every one walking in line, the middle-aged or nervous sportsman is spared the misgivings provoked by the appearance of a woodcock in an ordinary day's covert-shooting. Without going to the same lengths as the late General J. M'D., who vowed he always lay down when he heard "that cursed cry of 'Mark cock,'" I admit to a feeling

of uneasiness when in such circumstances I chance to be a "forward" gun; my experience being that no distance is too great, nor any risk of maiming a fellow-creature too heavy, to prevent the ordinary shooter from discharging his gun at a woodcock.

Moreover, the cock you bag when pheasant-shooting is a mere interlude, and looked on as such, just as the infinitesimal portion of *bécasse sur canapé* with which you are supplied at a dinner-party is an interlude also: a trailless apology for what the same bird would have been, had you been able to enjoy it alone, free to pick your unhampered way from breast to thigh, and wing to toast.

However, I am not ashamed to confess that I am not one of those who hold that the trail is the special *bonne bouche* of a woodcock, without which the bird is valueless. This puts me in mind of a sad disappointment I once unwittingly caused Jack, who is somewhat of an epicure. Being in Christiania early in the month of November, I came across a poult er's shop hung with fresh-killed woodcock, and, mindful of my relative's tastes, I bought half-a-dozen of them, and despatched them to him on my arrival at Hull two days later. The letter in which he acknowledged their receipt was not couched in the enthusiastic terms that I considered my generosity warranted, and meeting him a week or two later in London, I pointedly asked him how he had found the woodcocks?

"Oh! they were good enough," he answered moodily, "I believe the cook made them into a pie."

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"Made them into a pie!" I repeated incredulously; "what do you mean?"

"Mean!" spluttered the baffled voluptuary, "why the scoundrel who sold them to you had drawn them all."

Then, and not till then, did I recollect that a Norwegian would as soon think of eating a woodcock's trail, as I of indulging in Gammel-Ost for breakfast.

DECEMBER

Dec. 5th.—I have been out hunting to-day on Peter, our aged carriage-horse: a form of exercise admirably calculated to stimulate a sluggish liver, but less adapted to satisfy the ardour of an ambitious rider to hounds, an imputation, however, from which I have happily been free all my life. Still, it enables me to keep in touch with my friends; it affords excellent opportunity of participating in that flow of anecdote and *bardinage* nowhere more in evidence than at the covert ride, and it further necessitates ample display of that long sufferance of which, *pace* Belinda, I am proud to consider myself the possessor. For it is now nearly a decade since Peter, denuded of the flowing tail which for four happy years he had flaunted on his breeder's farm, was first introduced into the shafts of our wagonette, and the “wild freshness of morning” no longer displays itself in either his paces or his appearance; while, had I any curiosity as to his lineage, I should consult the register of the Shire Horse Society before applying to Messrs. Weatherby. Consequently, though without reproach in his natural sphere of life, that of uncomplainingly drawing a vehicle at his own pace, he fails lamentably when asked to take part in an amusement for which he has neither inclination nor

aptitude. True, having, I suppose, some latent sense of humour, he will endeavour to persuade you to the contrary, by indulging in elephantine gambols on his way to the meet, and by galloping—such a gallop!—with much simulated fury over the first two or three fields after hounds have found; but he then subsides into a very bone-shaking trot—the canter is an unknown quantity to Peter—and indicates in more ways than one his perfect willingness to return to the comforts of his loose-box. Of his jumping powers I am unable to express an opinion, for neither Peter nor I have ever been bold enough to attempt a display of them, though he will pick his way through a very well-defined gap with a caution that is as ludicrous as it is commendable. Thus on the rare occasions on which I take the field on his back, I have to fall back on my knowledge of the country, and the exercise of such “ret-ketching” woodcraft as nature has endowed me with, to see anything of the sport at all: a combination which usually shows me how lamentably deficient I am in the latter quality. However, to-day we had a slow, dragging, hunting-run, admirably adapted to Peter’s capabilities, and having made a lucky guess at our fox’s point, I was fortunate enough to be an eye-witness of an interesting instance of vulpine cunning. Trotting quietly along a deep lane, in the direction of a wood, for which our quarry was evidently making, I presently became aware of a small dark fox—an unmistakable vixen—travelling slowly across an adjacent field, and pulled up behind a hay-stack to watch it. Poor brute!

it was very weary; its tongue was out; its coat was black and staring; its brush was trailing heavy with mud, and it had the unmistakable look of a beaten animal. None the less, it still had all its wits about it, for it went out of its way to run through a flock of sheep, which at once wheeled over, and foiled its line. But the fox had another string to its bow yet. In a corner of the same field was a rough bullock-shippon, and at its much-trampled entrance a puddle of filthy black liquid manure, in which it rolled, and then without waiting to shake itself, slipped through the fence and disappeared from view. The hounds brought its line into the same field, and almost up to the fence itself, but beyond this they could make nothing of it, and as I discreetly held my tongue, the clever little vixen lives to fight another day, or, better still, to bring up a healthy litter of cubs next spring.

I had often heard of hunted foxes rolling in sheep-folds and manure-heaps to destroy their own scent, but had never been an eye-witness of the fact before, and probably never shall again.

Dec. 7th.—I am aware that many people firmly believe that there is a future life for the lower animals as well as for human beings, but I never met one of them until to-day. Last summer we were visited by an itinerant Italian organ-grinder, who bore on his instrument the prettiest little monkey I have ever beheld. As a rule the mere sight of a monkey fills me with loathing, but this was a really attractive little beast, cleanly and

good-tempered. It was evidently on the best of terms with its master, who seemed much attached to it, and Belinda, who has a passion for outlandish pets, went into raptures over it, and has since frequently hinted what an agreeable addition such an animal would be to our establishment.

To-day we were just finishing lunch, when the strains of "The Absent-Minded Beggar" on a piano-organ caused her to rush to the front door exclaiming that "it must be that man with that dear monkey;" but alas! though "the man was still there, the monkey had gone." He recognised Belinda at once, greeting her with a flash of his white teeth, and a "*Buon Giorno, Signorina*"; a title which I have no doubt the rogue indiscriminately applies to all the ladies with whom his vocation brings him in contact. But when she anxiously inquired after his monkey, the smile faded from his face—I vow the fellow's eyes filled with tears, or a very good imitation of them—and throwing up his right hand, he suddenly let his head fall heavily on his left shoulder; a most expressive bit of pantomime that was easy of interpretation.

"Do you mean it is dead?" asked Belinda. The Italian nodded his head several times before answering, "*Si, Signorina, e morto;*" and then pointing to the sky, he solemnly added, "*e là.*" To some people this may sound irreverent; to others, ludicrous; but it was said so simply and naturally as to remove any suspicion of either feeling; while it moved Belinda to bestow such munificent largesse on the man, as to ensure us a visit

from every monkey-owning organ-grinder in Saffron Hill for months to come.

The doctrine of a future life for the lower animals is one towards which I am not without a certain leaning myself; but granted the probability of such a thing, my chief variance with its apologists is their contention that such an existence must of necessity be a beatific one. I have personally known several dogs and a great many horses that merited a very large slice of Purgatory, while I can hardly believe the infernal regions themselves would be large enough for the Highland bull which once hunted me into a river in the Isle of Lews, and kept me a reluctant prisoner in it.

Dec. 10th.—For some time past our County Council, laudably anxious to relieve the tedium of winter evenings in the rural districts, and also perhaps, to show that, like Todger's, “it can do it when it likes”—with the ratepayers' money—has hired a Professor to deliver lectures on the art and practice of agriculture throughout the shire; and we have already been favoured with three of them in the village. The first one proved an enormous “draw”; attracted by the novelty of the proceeding and the presence of a local magnate in the chair, the whole neighbourhood crowded into the village school-room; farmers, accompanied by the ladies of their families, came from far and near; for this occasion only the labourers forsook the Red Lion; and all the young gents in breeches and gaiters who are learning to be land-agents, arrived early with note-

books and pencils. The Professor, a person of undoubted chemical knowledge, addressed us for an hour and a half with great fluency, but so wrapping up his subject in scientific language as to render it absolutely unintelligible to three-fourths of his audience. A second lecture a week later was much less largely patronised, and the third, at which I assisted last night, proved, in the language of the theatrical profession, "an absolute frost." However, the Professor gallantly faced rows of almost empty benches, and delivered a very scientific address on the properties of manures, in the course of which he took the opportunity of warning his auditors against the practice—formerly common enough among them—of mixing lime and farmyard manure together. Whilst he was dwelling on this point, I happened to notice old Jacky Baverstock, who rents a few fields near the village, listening to the speaker with a rapt attention that contrasted very favourably with the indifference of his neighbours. His attitude quite cheered me, as no doubt it did the Professor. "Here, at all events," thought I, "is a sensible man, who appreciates his County Council's efforts to benefit him, and intends to profit by them." But alas! walking past Jacky's holding this very afternoon, I watched him, from behind a hedge, prepare a savoury compost wherewith to tickle his shrewish pastures to a smile next spring; and was shocked to see that, heedless of Professors, or science, or, I might add, common sense, the old fellow was industriously mixing his lime and manure together, as he has probably done for forty years, and will con-

tinue to do to the end of the chapter. I felt minded to speak to him, but, reflecting that if he would not believe a Professor he would scarcely pay heed to me, I continued my walk, and presently fell in with a very different class of agriculturist, my friend, Mr. Hardcastle. To him I expatiated at some length on old Baverstock's disregard of the good advice he had received not twenty-four hours earlier.

Hardcastle heard me out, and then voiced what I have no doubt is the universal feeling of the countryside. "Well, sir," he said, "a-coorse Jacky is wrong, and it don't need a lectorer from London to tell un so, but I 'spect s he feels very much as I do, and that is that if he don't know much about chemicals, he can make his land pay un, and I'll wager that's more than that theer Professor could do. I've been a farmer this fifty year or more, and my father, and my grandfather, afore me, and tain't likely as a young feller in a black coat as never sped a plough in his life is going to teach me how to manage my land." It were useless to argue with such a dogmatist as this, so I dropped the subject; but as I strolled home, I pondered on the perversity of those who, having ears to hear, refuse to use them, no less than on the fatuity of the little tin gods who rule our county finances. Do they seriously imagine that a series of disjointed addresses, couched in the language of the chemical laboratory, and delivered by an absolute stranger, can amend the errors and alter the convictions of the most conservative and prejudiced class in our islands?

Dec. 12th.—It has been bitterly cold to-day; a foretaste of the hard winter the weather-wise have promised us. A hard black frost has held the patient earth in its iron grip; a piercing wind has blown from the north, and at intervals thin showers of frozen snow have fallen from the lowering sky. It is the “hard grey weather” of which Kingsley sang in one of the finest epic poems in our language—had it been written nowadays it would rightly have been dubbed Imperialist—but which, none the less, true to its savage nature, relentlessly killed him at last. I hate and fear the “black north-easter” myself, but, like a great many other things that are dreaded and disliked, I respect it, and never so much as when “it fills the marsh with wild-fowl,” or, in other words, brings a stray wild-duck into our little brook. For wild-fowl are indeed *rara aves* in our part of the world, only visiting us under stress of such weather as this, and then staying as short a time as possible, so that it is a matter of pure luck whether one chances on them or not. I wonder how many times I have sneaked and crawled about the brook in search of them, only to return home empty-handed? Yet it is a sport that has a rare fascination for me, and such an afternoon as I have spent to-day gives me far more pleasure than an ordinary day’s covert-, or partridge-shooting. In the first place, I was entirely alone, a fact that in itself always enhances my enjoyment of any sport. I am not of an unsociable disposition:

“I love not man the less, but nature more,”

and like many men I delight in the feeling of solitude, and of trying to circumvent wild creatures by my own unaided woodcraft, while “the Viking’s blood” within me is stirred to a certain grim pleasure of battling with the elements in this bitter weather.

The cold was piercing in those lonely fields by the brook this afternoon; the fallows lay black and grim under their sprinkling of snow, and the pastures were withered and brown in the grip of the cruel frost; the landscape was veiled in a thin white mist which chilled the very marrow in one’s bones, and all the ordinary sounds of the country, the lowing of cattle, the barking of dogs, the call of birds, were hushed in the mysterious silence which great cold invariably brings in its train. Hardly a sign of life was to be seen; such cattle as were abroad huddled together under the hedgerows; a few rooks sat with ruffled plumage in the leafless branches of the ash-trees, and, too benumbed with cold and hunger to fear man, eyed me listlessly as I passed below; and once a hare started unwillingly from its form, and slipped and scrambled painfully across an iron-bound fallow. Still it was the perfection of weather for attracting wild-fowl to the brook, and Sam, the retriever, and I had a red-letter day, getting two wild-duck, a teal, three full-, and one jack-snipe, four golden plover, and to top up with, a right and left of rocketing wood-pigeons in the fir plantation on our way home; and when I laid my bag out on the coach-house floor, I would not have changed it for all the pheasants of Croxteth or Holkham.

Dec. 15th.—No provincial town is without its curiosity-shop, and the Wardour Street of X. is Gallowgate, a gloomily named thoroughfare that I never fail to visit when opportunity offers, in the hopes of acquiring one of those bargains in old china or furniture, which, in my experience, only fall to the lot of one's friends. To-day, as usual, I failed to come across the Sheraton sideboard ardently desired by Belinda, and which she confidently expects to acquire some day for £3—the sum at which her great-aunt is reputed to have secured one—but *en revanche*, I purchased at the modest outlay of fourpence, a second-hand book which has afforded me unalloyed enjoyment. It is a translation of a French treatise on shooting: “*Le Chasseur au Chien d'arrêt*,” by M. E. Blazé, a retired veteran of the Grand Army, who had turned his sabre into a fowling-piece, and who so admirably imitates the style of Alexandre Dumas, *père*, that, had the latter been a sportsman, one could imagine the book to have been written by him under a pseudonym. M. Blazé, however, was not only a sportsman, and of his period and class apparently a sound one, but a philosopher and an epicure to boot, so that his work contains a happy mixture of instruction and amusement, conveyed in a style peculiar to his nationality. My only regret is that I have not read it in the original, for it has evidently lost much in translation.

Thus addressing an imaginary tyro, who has killed two partridges at one shot, he says, “Young man, you may be satisfied. A bright future opens for you.

That shot shows you will be a sportsman. In such manner Bonaparte, before Toulon, announced to the world Napoleon of Austerlitz."

Not that Blazé is partial to the society of young men out shooting. A few pages later he remarks, "Be careful of young sportsmen. If you walk with them, place yourself rather in the rear than in front. These youngsters sometimes lose their heads at the sight of a partridge; a hare causes them a giddiness, and a pheasant throws them into convulsions."

None the less, I am grieved to say that our author occasionally advocates practices of a most unsportsman-like nature; as, for example, to always shoot a sitting hare in the head, for he once "shot at a hare on her form within twenty yards, which only left a handful of fur on the seat, and the beast still ran." Far more reprehensible is his advice to those who own no pheasant coverts to sow a little buckwheat on their land in the vicinity of those of their more opulent neighbours, piously adding that: "Providence is generous; it hither conducts these noble creatures, and you share your neighbour's pheasants, leaving to him the expense and trouble of preserving them." He also devotes a chapter to the best methods of suborning keepers.

It is a thousand pities that M. Blazé and Colonel Peter Hawker, who must have been contemporaries, were never owners of adjoining manors!

To my surprise he refers to the delights of an overhead or rocketing shot, rightly deeming it "*le coup du roi*." I was under the erroneous impression that this sort

of thing was a sealed book to the shooter sixty years ago. The anecdotes with which he interlards his hints to sportsmen are of a most entertaining nature, and one in particular, of a dog ordered by its master to bring him a hot coal, convinces me that Blazé was a student of Gulliver's, no less than Munchausen's, Travels. He propounds two curious theories in Natural History. Speaking of hares, of which he is a great amateur, he advises any one who kills "a leveret marked on the forehead with a white star to seek again in the same spot: its brother will not be far off. A leveret born alone has no mark."

I wonder what gave rise to this idea?

Again he asserts that in France there are four kinds of partridges: the grey, the red-legged, a larger variety of the latter only found in the south where it is called the *Bartarelle*, and a fourth or migratory species, which, however, he admits he has never seen.

I think this latter can be dismissed as chimerical, but I am curious about the *Bartarelle*. Can it possibly have been some bird of the smaller bustard tribe from Northern Africa, now extinct in France? From the very vague description M. Blazé gives of it, such might easily have been the case.

Dec. 16th.—Last night we dined with the B.'s, where our host told us an anecdote illustrative of the awkwardness which can be caused by a mistaken excess of zeal. When in the army he had a soldier-servant, a typical Irishman from County Clare, devoted to his

master, but afflicted with the curse of garrulity. B. married while still in the service, and, not without misgivings as to the wisdom of such a course, allowed Tim to accompany him on his honeymoon in the capacity of valet. Like most people similarly situated, B. and his wife complacently imagined they could pass themselves off as an old married couple, but fearing his servant's loquacity might lead him to reveal the real state of affairs, B. solemnly warned him against doing so. Tim readily promised to be discreet, but the B.'s had hardly been twenty-four hours at the seaside hotel where they were spending their honeymoon, before a marked, but distant, curiosity on the part of their fellow-guests left no doubt in their minds that their domestic's fatal passion for gossip had led him to disclose what they innocently supposed to be a profound secret, only known to themselves and him. In great wrath B. summoned him to his presence. " Didn't I order you on no account to tell any one that the mistress and I were just married? " he thundered.

" Ye did, sorr," eagerly replied Tim, " an' faith! I put thim nicely off the scint, for whin that omadhaun av a head-waither axed me av you and the mistress were married, I towld him *no, but that you were going to be!*"

To what must be attributed the revival of the taste for port wine? Although I am proud to say that personally I have never wavered in my allegiance to the glorious liquor, time was, and that not so very long ago, when it had almost ceased to figure on the dinner-

table, and when it did, men passed it wistfully by, shaking their heads, bewailing their recalcitrant livers, and talking of gout and rheumatism. Yet nowadays exactly the reverse is the case; wherever I dine, port is the only wine drunk after dinner, while last night B. further revived an old and praiseworthy custom, by offering it with the cheese. Moreover, when in London I notice that the young men at the club drink port after lunch, and I am sure that half the flasks in our hunting-field are filled with the same generous fluid.

I cannot help thinking that one of the chief reasons for this revolution in taste is due to the recent introduction of a lighter and, to my mind, pleasanter, wine than was in vogue a quarter of a century ago, and which, I fancy, must be of the same description as that of which our ancestors used to consume three bottles a piece at a sitting: a custom which now seems no less barbarous than impossible. Yet once in my life I met one of those heroes of a bygone age; a charming, hale old man of seventy-six, who took his part in a wet day's shooting with all the zest of a lad of twenty. At lunch the conversation turned on wine, and I deferentially asked him if he had ever known a real three-bottle man? "Known one, indeed!" he cried, with a fine disdain, "why, I was one myself!" Yet the convivial habits of his youth had apparently not affected his health, nor certainly his nerve, for I was subsequently told that only a week or two before, when riding about his estate on a fifteen-hand pony, the old man coming to a gate through which he wished to pass,

and finding it locked, took his mount by the head, and essayed to jump it in cold blood, with the result that horse and rider tumbled neck and crop over the obstacle. His horrified farm bailiff who witnessed the performance rushed to his master's assistance, but all the old gentleman remarked, as he scrambled to his feet, was: "Dear me! I hope, Thomas, I haven't torn my new coat."

Truly they must have been giants in the land in the early days of the last century.¹

Dec. 17th.—In a letter from Tom, received this morning, he says: "When you were shooting with me in August, do you recollect my pointing out one of the ghillies to you as a man of Gargantuan appetite! I asked him one day after you had left, if he could eat a whole leg of mutton at a sitting? His reply was very characteristic of the cautious county of Fife, from which he hailed. "Ar canna say preeessely, for ar never tried tae dae sae, but"—warming to his subject—"ar ken fine ar could gi'e ut a *bonnie fricht.*'"

Dec. 18th.—To the Hunt Ball at X., a time-honoured festivity that I have now attended for more years than I care to count. Time was—ah me! how long ago it seemis!—when I used to look forward to this ball with all the anticipation that I believe Belinda still feels; when, incredible as it seems to me now, I used to order button-holes from Piccadilly, and gloves

¹ Since these lines were first written, the subject of them has been gathered to his fathers; ætat 94.

from the Burlington Arcade wherewith to do honour to the occasion; and when I used to await the arrival of the young lady who for the moment reigned paramount in my affections, at the very door of the Town Hall in order to secure what I considered my fair share of the dances on her programme. *Ay de mi!* I would give a good deal now to feel the self-consciousness of youth once more, when the fit of one's coat and the bow of one's necktie were matters of the deepest concern; when the announcement that the supper-room was open aroused no feeling save that of contemptuous pity for the *chaperons* and fogeys who at once crowded to it, and when one at last sought it oneself, *lassatus sed non satiatus* of dancing, one quaffed bumpers of execrable champagne with no fear of the morrow before one's eyes.

Still, next to being young oneself, it is good to mix with young people, and though my share in the evening's amusement consists in hanging in doorways with my compeers of a past generation, or occasionally at Belinda's behest, in dancing the Lancers with some unattractive wallflower, it delights me to see the rising generation enjoying itself, and to note with the cynical eye of middle-age how exactly the young of the human race reproduce the foibles and vanities of their parents. Only last night I overheard Miss Rosebud unblushingly impress upon a gawky and bepimpled youth from the Universities, that he must have made a mistake in thinking she was engaged to him for a dance she wanted to "sit out" with Captain Varnish

of the Hussars; and I thought with a smile of how her mother had once treated me in the same unceremonious fashion in this very room, and felt a touch of sympathy with the lad, who retired smarting and unconvinced, but endeavouring to carry off his discomfiture *en galant homme*. Ah well! my young friend, the day will come all too soon when you will be girded in the proof-armour of disillusion, and, like myself, will sigh for the time when such pin-pricks as the fickleness of lovely woman could find out the joints of your harness.

Dec. 20th.—Most of us have heard the story of the little girl who, suddenly asked by a school-inspector, “Who made her vile body?” meekly replied, “Mother, and Auntie cut out the skirt,” but it was new to the vicar, to whom I retailed it to-day. He capped it, however, by a personal experience of his own. Being on a visit to a brother-parson in Yorkshire, he was asked to examine a class of infants in orthography; and writing E A R on the blackboard, asked what it spelt. There was no answer of any description from the class, so the vicar called up the head of it, and giving his ear a gentle pinch, asked, “What do you call this?” “Mar lug,” was the unabashed reply of the youthful Chesterfield.

Dec. 22nd.—The annual offering of a bottle of elderberry wine, which Mrs. Jones, Belinda’s old nurse, never fails to send us at this time of the year, arrived

to-day with the donor's "love and respectful duty." I admit I do not appreciate this excellent beverage as much as I should like to, though taken "hot with" at bedtime it is esteemed a sovereign remedy for colds, and as such often exhibited by Belinda to the maid-servants, but it is certainly pleasant in these days to receive a present with any one's "respectful duty."

I am sorry to think that the art of making these home-made wines and other old-fashioned country delicacies is now almost a thing of the past. Who nowadays ever invite their friends to partake of a syllabub under the cow; who makes cowslip or currant wine; or where does one taste damson cheese? These were all delicacies of my youth, and though, with exception of the latter, I should not care to renew my acquaintance with them, I cannot but regret their extinction. I am sure Mrs. Jones' elderberry wine is far nicer, and ever so much more wholesome, than the "port wine" at 1s. 6d. a bottle that the poor people buy at this season in the grocers' shops at X.

Another similar feature of country life that has almost ceased to exist is the use, whether as medicine or food, of wild herbs and plants. Formerly, every village of any importance contained a "simpler" or herbalist; and though a few of them remain here and there,—I believe Thomas knows of one whom he consults for corns—as a class they are practically extinct. Perhaps this is not a matter for deep regret, for I fancy they traded as much on their customers' credulity as on their own knowledge of simples, but it certainly

is a pity that any wild plant, which has an edible value, should be neglected from sheer ignorance of its good qualities. I wonder if any labouring man of the present day ever eats Monks' Rhubarb, or Good King Henry, or even young stinging-nettles? I doubt it, yet these were all plants that their grandsires were glad to eat, and even prized as delicacies.

However, there are yet parts of England where edible weeds are still appreciated. Two or three years ago when staying with friends in the extreme north of Lancashire, I partook of a most excellent vegetable soup made from the leaves of a wild plant locally known as "Easterman Giant," and which, in the form of broth, is extensively eaten by the poor people of that neighbourhood. I did not see the plant myself, nor am I botanist enough to know to what family it belongs, but from its flavour I imagine it to be a species of sorrel. The derivation of its curious name puzzled me exceedingly, until I consulted the vicar, who is something of an etymologist, but he explained it at once as a corruption of the monkish "*mangiare*"; *i.e.* something that is eaten at Easter, about which time it is usually fit for consumption.

Dec. 26th.—Christmas has come and gone, and, like most people when they have emerged from childhood, I feel intensely relieved. I have eaten roast-beef and —under protest—plum-pudding; I have sent a goose to the station-master, and tobacco and tea to the old people at the workhouse; I have feed the butcher's

boy and the postman—the latter an official with whose visits I would cheerfully dispense at this season of the year—and I have presented each member of my establishment with a Christmas offering, the selection of which has caused Belinda much anxious reflection, it being a matter of some difficulty not to give the same article to the same person every year. I should be afraid to estimate the number of Cardigan jackets that Thomas has received since he entered my service, and this year it once more fell to his lot to be presented with another; a fact which, coupled with a naturally misanthropical disposition, led him to receive his gift somewhat gloomily. Belinda handed it to him with the time-honoured remark, “Here is something to do your rheumatism good, Thomas.” “Thank you kindly, mum,” replied our retainer as he received the parcel with a most chastened expression, “nothin’ short o’ churchyard mould will ever do *my* rheumatism any good.”

Thomas is one of that almost extinct class of country domestics who, from servants, gradually become first, friends, and finally, autocrats, brooking no interference in what they consider their own department. Well do I remember that when Belinda first undertook the management of my household, she boldly proclaimed, with the courage of ignorance, her intention of putting up with no nonsense from Thomas; the natural result of this being that before long the two of them had a battle-royal over the planting of some bulbs. The contest raged with varying fortune for some time, but

at last Belinda, who has a fine spirit of her own, said in an icy tone that precluded further discussion: "My *orders* are, Thomas, that the bulbs are to be planted here, and nowhere else." "Very well, mum," replied her gardener, in a tone of angelic resignation, "of course it shall be as you wish, but it'll play the dooce with the h'appearance of my garden."

Dec. 28th.—To the annual meeting of the X. branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, where, when we had transacted our business, and were preparing to break up, we were electrified by an unsolicited address from a new member, the wife of a retired soda-water manufacturer, who has recently settled in the town. I had never met this lady before, though the fame of her extreme views on most subjects had reached my ears, but at the risk of being ungallant, I found both her appearance and manners unprepossessing to a degree, an unhappy combination probably due to her vegetarian and teetotal regimen.

Anxious to show the independence of the New Woman, and knowing that practically all the members of our branch of the Society are sportsmen, she treated us to a violent diatribe against every kind of sport, but especially stag-hunting, not, however, that any of us were sinners in this latter respect. By tacit agreement we treated her philippies with the forbearance due to her sex; and I trust that before our next meeting she will have learnt to tread a little less heavily on her neighbours' toes. I have the strongest objection to the modern

custom of women speaking on public platforms, especially when, as in the present instance, they have no practical knowledge of their subject ; for this good lady has the same intimate acquaintance with sport that I have with the Zenanas, to which I understand she unceasingly advocates the despatch of missionaries.

I hold no brief for the particular sport against which she fulminated to-day : I have never even assisted at a carted-deer hunt, and in theory, at all events, it has always seemed to me rather a contemptible amusement, which could be equally well supplied by running a drag, but to dub it cruel appears to me unfair. Cruelty I would define as the pleasure which a brutal man feels in inflicting pain on his fellow-creatures, human or other, for the personal gratification he derives from their sufferings ; as, for example, a fiend I read of in the newspaper some time ago, who roasted a live cat in an oven for no motive save his own devilish enjoyment. But this, thank God, has nothing in common with the feeling which prompts men to hunt a wild, or, as in the case of the carted-deer, a nominally tame animal. There are three dominant and inherent passions in mankind ; love, war, and the chase. There comes, alas ! an inevitable time of life, when the first remains a memory rather than a fact ; since the development of firearms that kill at five miles, the second has undoubtedly lost some of its glamour ; but the third appears to me to be actually increasing in power.

It is this feeling : the hereditary love of the chase, of woodcraft, venery—call it by what name you will—

coupled with the spirit of healthy emulation, of wishing to excel one's compeers in manly pursuits, that prompts men to hunt, and not a love of cruelty. Indeed, paradoxical as such a statement may seem, the animals would be the chief sufferers if sport were abolished, for of all classes with whom I have ever been brought in contact, sportsmen are the most humane, and treat dumb creatures the most kindly. Again, as more powerful pens than mine have pointed out, were sport done away with, nearly all wild animals in Great Britain would become extinct: if there were no fox-hunting, there would be no foxes. To this the ultra-humanitarians reply that it is better to exterminate this class of the lower animals than to preserve them until such time as it pleases us to kill them for our amusement; but this is a hypothetical theory that must remain unsolved until some Mowgli arise to tell us what the beasts themselves really think about the matter. Until this occur, I am fain to believe that they would elect for the present state of affairs; careful preservation, and a fair chance for life and the reproduction of their species.

Jan. 1st.—Belinda and I sat up to welcome the New Year, as yet scarce an hour old; and now she has gone to bed, and left me to sit with a cold pipe in my mouth, and to think, as I fancy many millions of men are also doing at the present moment, not only of the past year, but of many a one before it. It is perhaps only at times like the present that one does so, and indeed there cannot be many of us who often care to look very far

back in our lives, and think of broken friendships and despised affections ; of lost opportunities and things left undone ; of the golden harvest that lay before us in our youth, and of how few of its sheaves we have garnered into our store in our middle age. My pipe brought me enough and to spare of such thoughts, and I went to the open window, and looked out into the night. It was dark and clear, with what the Scotch call “a blink” of stars in the sky, and a fine, free, north wind blowing, that brought with it the jubilant peals of half-a-dozen distant churches ringing in the New Year ; and as I listened to them there came into my mind those most beautiful lines of a but little-known poet :

“ I’ve had my share of pastime, and I’ve done my share of toil,
And life is short—the longest life a span ;

For good undone, and gifts misspent, and resolutions vain,
’Tis somewhat late to trouble. This I know,
I should live the same life over, if I had to live again,
And the chances are I go where most men go.”

Would most of us live the same life over ? I trow not ; and yet who can tell ?

And then I shut the window, and went to bed also.

Telegrams :
'Scholarly, London.'

41 and 43 Maddox Street,
Bond Street, London, W.

October, 1904.

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